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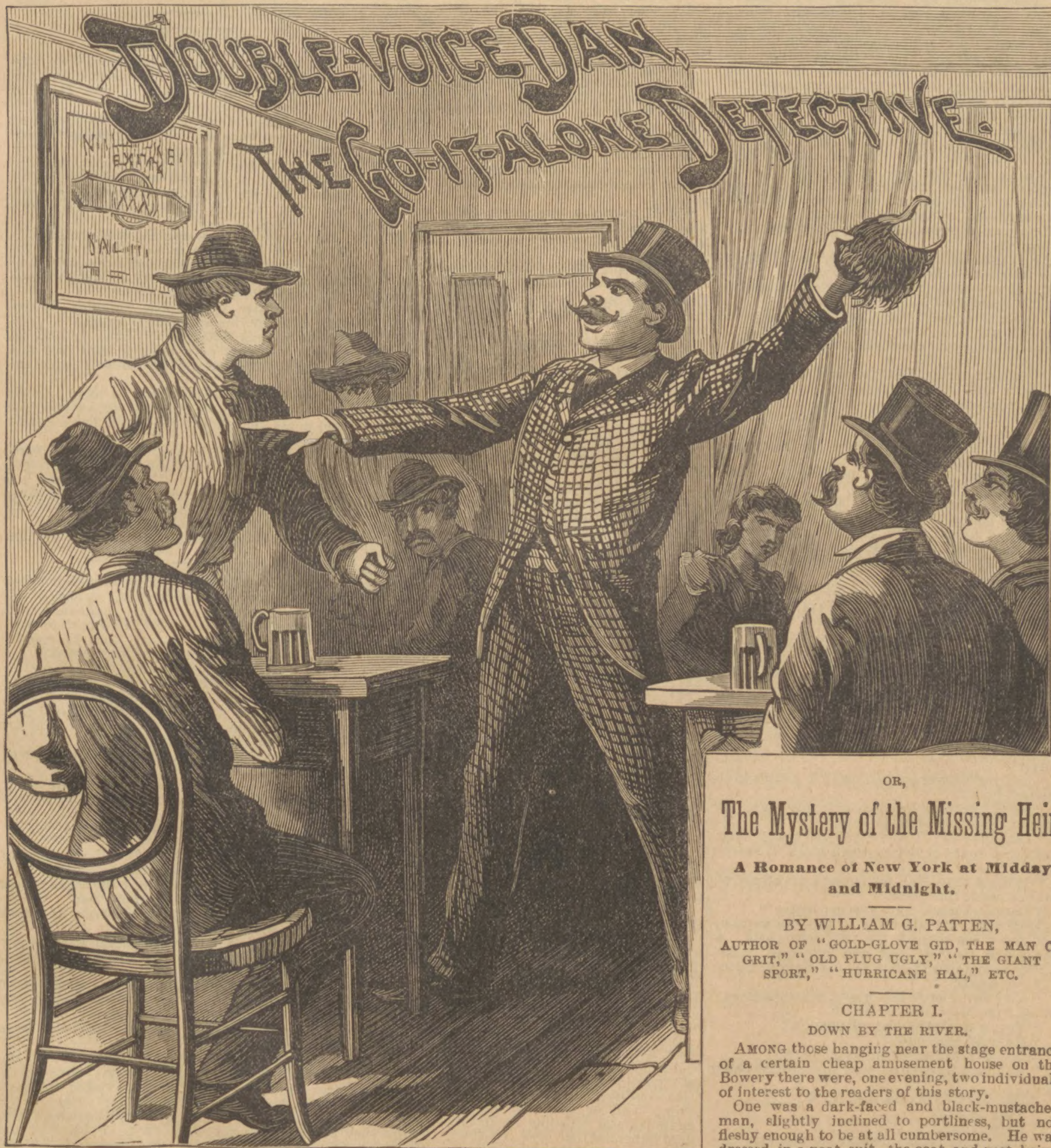
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OR,

The Mystery of the Missing Heir.

A Romance of New York at Midday
and Midnight.

BY WILLIAM G. PATTEN,
AUTHOR OF "GOLD-GLOVE GID, THE MAN OF
GRIT," "OLD PLUG UGLY," "THE GIANT
SPORT," "HURRICANE HAL," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

DOWN BY THE RIVER.

AMONG those hanging near the stage entrance of a certain cheap amusement house on the Bowery there were, one evening, two individuals of interest to the readers of this story.

One was a dark-faced and black-mustached man, slightly inclined to portliness, but not fleshy enough to be at all cumbersome. He was dressed in a neat suit, the coat and vest being dark and the pantaloons considerably lighter. There were patent leathers on his feet and a

"LOOK!" CRIED BANTON, EXULTANTLY. "THIS IRISHMAN'S THAT INFERNAL
DETECTIVE, DOUBLE-VOICE DAN!"

shiny silk hat on his head. A light summer overcoat was thrown over his left arm, and his left hand grasped a heavy walking-stick of the most approved sort.

Thus far the man was dressed correctly enough, but there was that about him which seemed to indicate his taste was inclined to the loud and showy. Across his vest was strung a heavy gold chain, and there was a show of expensive jewelry on various parts of his person. A diamond stud flashed in the bosom of his immaculate shirt, and the setting of his scarf-pin was also a large diamond. His fingers were loaded with rings.

This man's real name was Marlton Edgewood, but to a certain class of his acquaintances he was known as "Dandy Mac." Just how he obtained this latter title it is impossible to tell, but he was a man who mingled freely with the gamblers and sharps of Gotham, and his nonchalance concerning his losings or winnings at the gaming-table or on the race track had caused him to be known as the "Dead Game Sport."

Dandy Mac was certainly not more than thirty years of age, and he might be considerably less than that.

Mac's companion also aspired to be known as a sport of nerve, but lack of wealth limited his operations after a sorry manner. His name was Teddy Tobin, but he was familiarly called "Ted the Tipper." This came from the fact that he was always "loaded" with any amount of "dead straight tips" which he was anxious to part with for remuneration. He was an excellent talker, and had the knack of "whitewashing" any "fresh" sport who happened to fall into his hands. It was off these unsophisticated aspirants for sporting honors that The Tipper made his living, and his appearance seemed to indicate it was not such a very bad living he obtained, either.

His face was clean-shaved and ruddy—perhaps a trifle too ruddy. He wore a light gray suit with a fancy vest. His hat matched his suit, and a very pointed pair of piccadilly patent leathers adorned his feet. His necktie was flaming red. He carried no overcoat, but, like his companion, he had a heavy cane.

Both men were smoking very black and very strong cigars.

"It is time fer her ter come out," said Ted, his eyes fastened on the stage entrance.

"You are sure she does not appear again to-night?" questioned Mac.

"Dead sure, pal," was The Tipper's answer. "I tells yer I'm onter her lay wid bote feet. She allus comes out about dis time. It's a dead straight tip I'm givin' yer. See?"

"Don't get horsey, Ted!" advised the dandy.

"Why not? She's a high-stepper, old man, and as clean-limbed as a fawn, you bet! Why, dat neck of hers tells de kind of blood w'at's in her! An' dem eyes—"

"There, there! I have seen her from the front of the stage, and—"

"She's jest as trim off der boards as on, though her rig hain't none too good. It's neat, all der same, but I tells yer, she hain't gittin' der scads here w'at she oughter have."

"I think you are right, Ted. She is certainly a beautiful girl, and she can sing divinely. I am willing to squander a pot of boodle on her, if I can get the snap."

"Git der snap!" echoed the dapper sport, with supreme scorn. "Course yer kin git der snap! I tells yer, dese girls hain't going ter wear demselves out fer a dollar a night singing at dis kind of a place w'en dey kin make ten times dat an' not have to show demselves before a gang of Bowery hoodlums. It's dead easy ter ketch onter dey're kind."

Mac laughed, softly—unpleasantly.

"That will do, my boy. You are talking to me as if I were a kid. I have seen a bit of life myself, and know something about variety singers."

"But yer'd never spotted dis if I hadn't give ye der pointer."

"Simply because I seldom visit this place. It is a bit below my scale, you see."

"Oh, come off! I know you, old man! You are 'fraid some of der up-town snobs 'll see ye dere."

"It is not that, Ted, for no one I am afraid of ever comes to this place."

"Dat don't made dem none der better!"

Edgewood did not reply to this declaration, and for a few seconds the two were silent. A policeman strolled past and told some of the loungers to move on, but did not seem to notice the two sports.

"You say a lame boy meets her sometimes," came from Mac's lips, at length.

"Yes; a small kid w'at sells pape's."

"He is not here now?"

"No; he don't git round every night."

"And you have never seen any one else catch on?"

"No; but I have seen dem try."

"They failed?"

"Every time."

"Well, I am beginning to think this may be a prize worth capturing, if she does come from a Bowery concert hall."

"Didn't I tell yer so? Did yer ever know me ter give ye anything but a straight tip?"

Mac laughed, once more.

"You are not always infallible, Ted."

"I dunno w'at dat big word means, but I never give you a crooked pointer. I allus gives dem ter der coves w'at are no good. Dey hain't in it."

"And the poor fools have to pay to be switched on the wrong track."

"Well, dat's 'bout der size of it."

"Ted, you're a confounded fraud!"

The dapper dandy grinned.

"Oh, I know my gait!" he declared, proudly.

"It wouldn't do ter put dem all on ther right track, so dem as is no good I plays fer suckers. I keeps der right pointers fer dem as is in der ring."

At this moment, a ragged and disreputable-looking man approached them.

"I'm in mighty hard luck, pards," he declared, speaking with the accent and dialect of an illiterate Westerner. "Ther fact is I'm dead bu'sted—clean down ter bed rock an' not pannin' out fer shucks. Ef either o' you c'u'd guv me a grub-stake I'd be powerful thankful, an' it might lift me inter ther way o' makin' a strike."

At sound of the ragged man's voice, Marlton Edgewood gave a start and tried to peer into the tramp's face. It happened that the ragged stranger stood so his countenance was in the shadow, and the sport's scrutiny was far from satisfactory.

"Get on wid ye, now!" growled The Tipper. "W'at yer take us fer! We hain't puttin' up fer none of your kind. Ef yer don't get a move on, I'll call a cop an' have ye run in. See?"

The ragged mendicant made a gesture of despair and turned toward Edgewood. As he did so, the glare of the electric light at the corner fell full on his face. It was white and pinched, being partially covered by a straggling brown beard. The eyes were big and blue.

When Dandy Mac saw that face, he uttered a sudden exclamation and abruptly wheeled away.

That seemed the same as a refusal to the beggar.

"Well, may you two never know w'at it is ter come ter this!" he said, hopelessly, and then he turned to walk away, staggering a bit as he did so.

In a moment Mac had Ted by the arm.

"That face—those eyes!" guardedly cried the Dead Game Sport, as he glared after the tramp. "I could not have been mistaken! It was that man—*alive!*"

The Tipper was amazed.

"W'at's der matter wid yer?" gasped Ted, in astonishment. "You look like yer had seen a ghost!"

"Perhaps I have! We must follow that man."

"An' leave der girl. W'at yer givin' us? You're goin' daft, old man!"

"Hang the girl! Come on, if you want to scoop a boodle!"

"Yer don't mean ter find it on that duffer?"

Mac did not reply to this, but started after the tramp. Discovering his companion was in dead earnest, The Tipper hastened along, plying him with questions.

"Dry up!" commanded the dark-faced sport, shortly. "If you are ready to stand by me and keep your mouth shut, I will make it worth your time. We must take the opposite side of the street, so he will not dream he is followed."

They crossed the street, but Ted was not at all satisfied. He could not understand the object of his comrade in following the ragged street-beggar, and he still continued to question Mac. The portly sport was in no mood for that, and he finally said:

"Either keep still or git out! I will explain some time, but just now I want to attend strictly to business, and make sure he does not give me the slip."

"W'at yer goin' ter do?"

"Down him!"

"Fer keeps?"

"Sure."

"Say; I hain't goin' ter do dat job!"

"You have not been asked. If you haven't got the blood to come along, why, stay back. I don't want you."

That aroused Ted's pride.

"Humph!" he grunted. "I'll go anywhere youse do."

The mendicant made toward the East River, crossing Canal and turning down Rutgers street. He did not look back, for he plainly did not dream he was being followed. Why should any one wish to follow him?

Like evil shadows, the two men dogged the unsuspecting tramp.

South street was dark and deserted. In all New York there could scarcely have been a more lonely place found. The shipping clung along the piers and the masts and ropes were sometimes outlined against the lights of the Brooklyn shore. Out on the river the ferry-boats were pounding and whistling up and down, their colored lights drifting here and there. Above the river hung the lighted arch of the great bridge, across which a train was slowly creeping.

Down by the river was the place for a crime. Seldom by day was a policeman seen there, and

at night they kept themselves away from the dreary place, as much as possible.

Down there by the river a man with a dollar in his pocket carried his life in his hand. The slums of the great city lay close at hand, where poverty and crime, wretchedness and want mingled day by day. When God's bright sunlight dispelled the shadows from the narrow streets, many a crime-stained creature hid in the seclusion of a hovel room, not daring show himself to the world. When the shadows of night were over the world, he crept forth to skulk along the most deserted and gloomy ways.

What was his mission?

Crime!

Woe to the unlucky one whom he singles out as his prey! A swiftly skulking figure—a blow—a fall! Then the pockets of the unfortunate are rifled. Perhaps he is only stunned and will recover to find his assailant gone, and his money also vanished. Perhaps he will rise from the rocky pave no more. The chances are he will be flung into the river, and on the morrow the water may reveal the horrible secret.

But why should a ragged tramp be molested there?

The mendicant had no thought of danger. He moved along slowly, mechanically, his head bowed. To him the gloomy street, and the blackness of the night were symbolic of his life.

Suddenly he heard cat-like steps behind him. He was about to turn, when he received a terrible blow on the head, and was hurled senseless on the hard stones!

CHAPTER II.

THE TRAMP'S STORY.

MAC and The Tipper did not dream they were also shadowed. They were so intent about following the tramp that they did not think to look behind themselves.

Even while the two sports were standing near the stage entrance of the Bowery cheap theater they were under espionage.

A short distance away stood a man who appeared to be an Irish laborer. He was poorly dressed, and was smoking a short-stemmed black clay pipe. His old hat was pulled well down over his eyes.

In reality, the man was one of the most skillful private detectives in all New York. His name was Daniel Downing, but as he was a ventriloquist of remarkable ability, he was commonly known as "Double-voice Dan."

The detective was really watching Dandy Mac, although his appearance seemed to indicate he was not watching any one. Indeed, his manner was that of a man in hard luck and thoroughly disgusted with himself and the world.

When the policeman sauntered along, gazing sternly at him, the disguised detective made bold to ask the officer for a match, but was told to "get a move on."

"All roight, yez Honor," was the humble reply. "Oi know Oi hiv niver a bit av a roight on the earth at all, at all, but thot's not me fault. Divvil a worrud did Oi hiv ter soay about comin' heur. Nayther me fayther nor mither consulted me wishes on *thot* point."

"Come, come; get along!" growled the officer.

"Yis, sor; I'm goin'."

With that, the detective made a signal that was only seen by the policeman. A look of astonishment passed over the blue coat's face, then he sauntered on. The Irishman moved toward the corner, but soon turned back to resume watching the two men by the stage entrance.

When the ragged tramp came along he scarcely thought the almost as disreputable appearing laborer would have anything to give him. But certainly those two finely-dressed gentlemen could spare him a dime or a quarter without ever missing the small amount.

Sometimes the best of us are sorry judges of human nature.

Without seeming to do so, the disguised detective closely watched the result of the mendicant's appeal for alms.

It was the same as he expected; the tramp received nothing.

But something in Dandy Mac's manner strangely interested the shadow.

"He acts as if he did not wish the beggar to see his face," thought Double-voice Dan. "I believes he knows the man, or is afraid he will be recognized."

This became a settled conviction when he saw the excited motions of the Dead Game Sport, after the tramp had passed on.

"They are going to follow the poor devil," thought Dan. "I wonder what that is for. Well, I will follow them, and learn."

Thus it came about that the shadows were shadowed.

Down to the lonely river-front went the detective. He was the last person whom a footpad would have selected as a victim, for there was little prospect of finding any money on the round-shouldered man, who slouched along with his hands in the side-pockets of his coat and puffed the smoke from the black pipe into the faces of every one he passed.

The detective's footsteps were like those of a cat. They did not alarm the two men he

was following, though he was not far behind them.

Dan was more than a little amazed that Dandy Mac should follow the mendicant down to the lonely river front, and the fact that the sharp did so was enough to make the detective believe foul play was intended.

"If so, I will take a hand," thought the ventriloquist.

At a favorable spot, he saw the two men steal swiftly up behind their selected victim. Dan also shortened the distance between himself and the two rascals.

Suddenly Dandy Mac slid up behind the mendicant, and next moment, a blow from the rascal's cane stretched the tramp on the ground.

What was that?

A ray of light from a ferry-boat swinging down the river fell for an instant on something bright which glistened in the hand of the Dead Game Sport!

Then Mac bent over the tramp.

With a loud shout, the detective sprang forward, knowing the fallen man was in deadly danger.

He was barely in time.

Another moment of delay would have cost the tramp his life!

The murderous-minded rascal heard that shout and straightened up, a snarling curse coming from his lips. The Tipper also heard the cry, and he saw a dark figure come bounding toward them.

"Slide, Mac, slide!" hissed the dapper dandy. "We're spotted! The cove is dead onto us!"

Ted lost not a moment in taking to his heels, and Mac followed swiftly.

Double-voice Dan had jerked out a revolver, and he was sorely tempted to use it, but his better judgment prevented.

"No, I will not," he said. "I might bore Marlton Edgewood, and that would ruin everything. I shall know where to put my hands on either of these two skunks to-morrow. Just now, I will take a look at this poor fellow, and see how badly he is hurt. It is plain Edgewood meant to cook his mutton."

He bent over the unfortunate man, taking something from a pocket. The something was a tiny dark-lantern, and a moment later, it threw a ray of light into the unfortunate's face.

The man's eyes were wide open, but he seemed dazed. His lips moved, but no sound issued from them.

"Knocked silly," thought the detective, as he produced a tiny flask and poured a few drops of liquor between the man's parted lips.

The effect was instantaneous. The tramp uttered a low groan and lifted a hand to his head. When he took it away, the light of the tiny lantern showed it was covered with blood.

Dan assisted the unfortunate to sit up.

"It's a roight schmart bit av a crack yez got," observed the detective, still keeping up the assumption of an Irish character.

"Yes, I wuz struck."

"Roight, me b'y."

"Who did it?"

"A couple av gay dooks."

"W'at c'u'd hev bin their object?"

"Murder, me fri'nd."

"Why sh'u'd any one want ter murder me?"

"Now, doon't be afther axin' thot av th' loikes av me, fer Oi dunno. It's robbery they may hiv been up to."

A harsh laugh came from the injured man's lips.

"Wal, they c'u'dn't a' tackled a poorer subject," he declared, bitterly. "I pity their judgment, pard. I'm dead bu'sted wide open. I c'u'dn't raise enough money ter buy ther pizen ter putt me outer ther way."

"Bad 'cess ter th' luck! Oi'm not much better off. I hiv been out av worruk fer a bit, an' it has put me in harrud sleddin'. All th' soame, Oi hiv something loike half av a dollar about me clothes."

"Half a dollar! That would seem like a fortune to me now! With it I c'u'd git somethin' ter eat."

"Theer's divvil a bit av a hog about Mike Flannagan. Coome alarng wid me an' Oi'll spind thot half putthin' somethin' insoide thim ribs av yoor'n."

The tramp really protested, but his new-found friend would not hear to a refusal. Dan assisted the man to his feet and they walked away together, arm in arm.

Thirty minutes later the two men were seated in a cheap restaurant on the East Side. Dan had seen the ragged mendicant washed, and had attended to the slight wound on the man's head. Then he had the satisfaction of appeasing the poor wretch's hunger. That it was genuine became apparent from the ravenous manner in which he devoured the food placed before him.

When the man's appetite had been in a measure appeased, Dan asked for his story.

"My story? Wal, pard, it hain't much o' a story. Thar's not much to it."

The detective believed the man might tell him something of interest, so he continued to urge for the story.

"Wal, I won't tire ye by draggin' it out," said the tramp. "I kin tell it in a few words. It is this: I hed a schoolmate thet I alwus

trusted, and it made no diff'rance thet we both happened ter love ther same gal, fer neither o' us got her. We wuz both poor, an' she merried a rich old man who brought her ter New York. Then hean' I went West ter make our fortunes. We hed hard luck, an' knocked round fer years, but we didn't pick up wealth very fast.

"Our last venture tergether wuz in Collyrado. We reckoned we hed made a strike at last, but it petered out an' left us northing. We hed dug out some yaller, an' w'en my pard saw ther placer hed petered, he swore I wuz a Jonab. One night he tuck ther gold an' ther hosses an' sloped, leavin' me all alone thar in ther mountains.

"Wal, I felt monst'ous bad, but I kept peggin' erway, an' I struck it rich erg'in. I wuz pannin' ther yaller out ter beat all creation, w'en who sh'u'd turn up but my pard! He hed lost one o' ther hosses in a quicksand, an' somehow he hed not bin able ter find his way back ter ther settlements. He wuz purty nigh a dead man w'en he kem crawlin' back.

"I wuz allus a soft-hearted fool, an', arter list'nin' ter his yarn, I tuck him back. He seemed powerful penitent, an' we worked ther placer out, gittin' a clean heap o' yaller—ernough ter guv us both a good start.

"'Bout this yar time I wuz taken down with ther mountain fever. I kept gittin' wuss an' wuss, an' I 'lowed I wuz done fer. Then my pard deserted me erg'in! Yes, sir; w'en I wuz flat on my back an' not able to lift a han', he deserted me! An' he tuck ev'ry scrap o' yaller!

"No, I didn't die. An ole Injun kem along an' nussed me, but it tuck a long while ter git me round. I've been lookin' fer thet pard fer a right good bit, but I dunno's I'll ever find him. Luck hes bin clean erg'in me since thet time."

"W'u'd yez moind tellin' me th' name av' yez parrud?"

"Course not. His name wuz Marlton Edgewood!"

CHAPTER III.

A POOR GIRL'S PERIL.

SHORTLY after the two sports departed from the stage entrance of the cheap theater, a young girl came out. She was alone, but she looked around, as if expecting some one there to meet her.

That the girl was wondrously beautiful was revealed by the glare of the electric light. Her figure was round, plump and graceful as a fawn's, her complexion that of a pink and white blonde, her hair being a golden-red. The tint of perfect health was in her cheeks and lips, painted there by the hand of Nature. She did not need to resort to artificial coloring.

The girl's clothing was not at all expensive, but it was neat, to say the least. If she could look so handsome in such garments, what a dream of delight she would become in an attire suitable for one so charming!

This girl was nothing but a singer at the poor show-house. Many a fine lady would have turned up her aristocratic nose at the "creature" who was compelled to exhibit herself before a gang of Bowery hoodlums in order to earn the munificent salary of one dollar a night.

That is right, Mistress Blueblood, draw aside your skirts so they will not touch the poor clothing of her whom you choose to designate by the appellation of "creature." You have your fine clothes, grand home, elegant team; this being has shabby garments, a dark tenement home and she is obliged to walk. You have your grand dinners, while her food is of the plainest sort. You have your receptions, your gentlemen admirers, your intrigues. Of the last the world seldom knows, unless you happen to do something unusually bold and indiscreet.

That is right, draw aside your skirts! You have your secrets, which, if known by the world, would cause your social downfall; this child has no secrets and no social position. She is a singer in a cheap play-house, but never has the tongue of slander uttered a whisper against her. Her thoughts and her acts are pure.

Draw aside your skirts—they would contaminate her!

In all great New York there are not many like this poor child whom a cruel fate has forced to this manner of earning a meager living.

But there are some.

On the stage she was known as Bessie Blossom; in private life she was simply Mamie Winter.

In vain she looked around for the one whom she expected would be there to meet her. A sigh of disappointment came from her lips and her chin quivered a bit, as if it were not an easy thing to keep back the tears.

It had been a hard night. Things had gone wrong, and, to cap her wretchedness, she had offended the manager. She knew many of her companions were jealous of her, but she did not know they were plotting against her. She did not dream they would be so cruel; but it was their scheming that brought about her trouble with the manager.

Her heart was sore when she left the theater, but her trials were not over.

A thick-set, square-shouldered young fellow with a bull-dog face had been watching for her.

His eyes glowed evilly, as he saw her appear and he stepped rapidly forward to her side.

"Excuse me," he said, with an attempt at politeness, lifting his hat. "Was you looking for anybody?"

The girl gave a start and glanced at him in alarm. It was not her first experience of the kind, by any means.

"Yes—no," she faltered; then she turned to walk away.

The young rough was not to be baffled so easily. Half a dozen of his comrades were anxiously watching the result of his attempt, and he knew he would receive an unmerciful "guying" if he failed to "catch on," as he had boasted he could do. So he quickly placed himself in her path, saying:

"It is dreadful dark on some of these streets, so I guess you had better let me go 'long with ye to see that ye hain't hurt."

"Thank you," was the firm reply; "I do not care for your company."

The young tough growled something beneath his breath, but did not offer to let the girl pass.

"You needn't be afraid of me," he asserted. "I'm as mild as milk, an' jest as harmless. But there are others as may give ye trouble."

The girl looked around for a policeman, but there were none in sight.

"Will you let me pass, sir?"

"Won't you let me go 'long with you?"

"No, sir; I do not wish your company."

"Pr'aps you think I hain't good ernough for your style!" sneered the young bully. "I've had as good-lookers for chippies as you be, an' they didn't turn up their noses at me. You mustn't think you're so much better'n other folks."

The girl made a gesture of despair, and then, of a sudden, darted past him and hurried along the street.

A coarse burst of laughter came from the rowdies who had been watching the efforts of their comrade.

"Ob, you ain't in it, Tom!" shouted one, delightedly.

"Didn't I tell you!" cried another. "She won't catch on at all."

"We'll see about that!" came from the discomfited masher's lips. "If you fellers follow me, you'll see whether I'm goin' to be played for a chump in this kind of a way."

And then he started after the girl. Of course, all the others followed, expecting to see "sport."

When Mamie saw the gang was after her, she caught her breath and hurried on the faster, looking for an officer. It is a singular thing that when a person wishes to see a policeman, it is then the blue-coated guardians of the peace are the most difficult to find. And so it was in this case. The frightened girl did not see a single officer.

From the Bowery she hastened along Bleeker street. The gang did not attempt to overtake her there, but she felt sure they would when she turned from Bleeker into the dark and narrow way where lay her home. Her heart sunk and her limbs trembled beneath her.

When she reached Broadway, she paused a moment, glancing up and down. Quite a number of pedestrians were still on the street, and an upward bound car went rattling along. She was tempted to appeal to the first persons who came along, but they happened to be two elegantly-dressed youths, and her heart failed her.

Once more she hurried on.

"By Georgel what a pretty girl!" exclaimed one of the young fellows, looking after her.

"You are right, Clarence," agreed the other. "I don't think I ever saw a sweeter face in all my life!"

"But she was rather plainly dressed."

"Dress does not make the lady, old boy. Did you notice the look of terror in those heavenly blue eyes? She appeared frightened."

"Well, what is she out rambling around alone at this time of night for? That frightened look may be a part of her stock in trade, Walter. She was probably looking for one of us to offer our company home."

"I do not think she is that kind, Clarence," said Walter St. Cyril, soberly. "If ever I saw innocence and purity, it was written on her face!"

"Oh, come now!" laughed Clarence Van Zile. "That's too much! By Jove! I verily beliee you were mashed by that face!"

The two youths had paused, and suddenly St. Cyril caught his comrade by the arm.

"Look there!" he exclaimed, excitedly. "See that gang of rowdies!"

"Well?"

"I believe they are following that girl!"

"It looks so," confessed Clarence, calmly lighting a cigarette.

"It surely does! She is in danger!"

"Bosh, dear boy! Why doesn't she apply to a policeman?"

"There may be none around."

"Now, don't you get excited about this. It's more than even chances those fellows know what they are following."

Walter turned almost fiercely on his cool companion.

"Look here, Clarence!" he cried; "I am not

the fellow to see a girl insulted and assaulted by that kind of a gang, and I don't believe you are, either! Let's follow them."

"If we do not follow, we surely shall not see it. As for myself, I have no desire to mix in a muss and get my head kicked off."

Something like a look of contempt fled across Walter St. Cyril's beardless countenance.

"Then you can remain here or go where you please," he said, with determination. "I am going to follow that gang."

He avoided the hand that was thrust out to grasp his arm, and a moment later, he was half-way across Broadway.

Clarence Van Zile stood irresolutely for several seconds, looking after his friend, a scowl on his handsome face.

"What a hot-headed blade he is!" came from his lips. "Now, he is bound to get himself into a terrible muss, but I can't let him go alone. That would seem cowardly. He doesn't stop to consider the danger at all. It is a mighty bad quarter down that way, and murder has been done on those narrow streets many a time, but—Well, here goes!"

With that, he hastened after St. Cyril.

"Look here, old man," said Clarence, when he overtook his friend, "I'm not going to let you get your fool head broken alone! Perhaps you don't know the kind of quarter that lays down this way?"

"Yes, I do," was the reply.

"It is tough."

"I know that."

"A fellow is apt to be tapped."

"You need not come, if you are afraid."

That hurt Clarence as much as a blow in the face.

"Walter!"

"Well?"

"You do not really mean that! I have a little caution, that is all, and—"

Walter grasped his friend's hand.

"I take it all back, chum," he said. "I know you are not a coward, and I did not think how those words would sound. I am bound to see the end of this, now I have started in."

"Then I am with you, though we may be wasting our time."

They took the opposite side of the street from the gang of young toughs, hoping to avoid attracting attention to themselves. They saw the girl hurrying under the lights ahead, and once she glanced back for a moment. Then she started to run, but seemed too frightened to do so.

"It's a confounded shame!" growled Walter. "If we see a cop, I will put him onto it."

But all the policemen seemed to have taken special pains to conceal themselves.

As they crossed Fifth avenue, an elevated train rumbled along above their heads.

Beyond Fifth avenue a score of dark little streets and alleys turn off from Bleeker. They are poorly lighted or not lighted at all, and a more favorable place for some evil act could scarcely be found. As much as possible, respectable people avoid this quarter in the night.

The girl seemed to realize the time of her greatest peril had arrived, but she was unable to avoid the young ruffians on her track. The one who had accosted her at the stage entrance hurried forward, and just after she turned off into one of those dark and narrow streets, he overtook her, his companions being close at hand.

"Hold on a bit, my beauty!" he sneeringly cried, clutching her by the arm. "I've told the boys I'd have a kiss from them red lips to-night, and I'm goin' to keep my word, you can bank on that! It's no use squirming or squealing, for I've got you foul!"

Oh, the horror that filled the poor girl's heart! She fully realized the terrible peril she was in, and her strength came near utterly deserting her. Indeed, she sunk in a half-fainting condition, and it was only when she felt the ruffian's arms about her and his whisky-scented breath on her cheek, that she cried aloud for help.

Even then, the cry was weak and broken, like that of a wounded bird.

The wretch laughed aloud in a brutal manner. "If you don't pipe louder than that, you won't create much of a stir," he said, attempting to press his vile lips to hers.

She clinched her hands and struck him in the face, exerting all her strength. A snarl broke from him, and his companions, who had now gathered around, laughed at the sight.

"She's a cat, Tom!" cried one. "Look out for her claws!"

"I'll tame her!" was the boasting retort.

"She's a game chick, but—"

"Help! help!" screamed the girl.

"Put yer fin over that mouth or she'll raise a breeze," advised one of the gang.

"Oh, there hain't any one round to hear her," said Tom.

"That's just where you make a large error!" cried a ringing, manly voice. "We are around, and we propose to have a deal in this sport!"

Then two young fellows came plunging through the gang, hurling them right and left.

Tom uttered an exclamation of fury and dismay, and whirled to meet the attack. As he did so, the girl broke from his grasp and fled.

Then a hard fist, propelled by a muscular arm, struck the leader of the ruffians fairly between the eyes, and he was knocked down in a beautiful manner.

CHAPTER IV.

MAMIE'S LAME CHAMPION.

MAMIE WINTER was too terrified to pause to see who had come to her rescue. She only realized she was free from the clutch of the half-intoxicated young ruffian, then, just as Tom went down before the blow from Walter St. Cyril's fist, she wheeled and ran for her life.

Panting and sobbing, wringing her hands, she fled down the dark street. Once she stumbled and fell. At any other time, the fall would have hurt her severely, but she did not mind it then. In an instant she was on her feet and flying onward once more.

The sounds of the struggle behind her soon ceased to reach her ears. Once or twice she saw a dark shadow that was skulking along the street, and her startled heart throbbed anew with alarm.

But she was not molested again. Still she continued to hurry on.

Of a sudden, a little dark figure came hobbling toward her. She shrunk aside, and a scream broke from her lips when the figure darted forward and caught at her hand.

"Mamie!" called a shrill, childish voice.

What a flood-wave of relief swept over her! For a moment she could not speak, and the voice went on:

"Why, Mamie! you're all trembling and panting! What is the matter? You are frightened! What has frightened you?"

"Is it you, Tim?" she faintly asked—"is it really you?"

"Of course it is! You're not mad with me, are you, Mamie? I meant to meet you, but it was so hard selling the papers out—and—and—I didn't sell them, after all!"

The childish voice quivered, indicating the speaker was on the verge of tears.

"Poor Little Tim!" came from the lips of the girl.

"My leg and my back both ached awful to-day," went on the childish voice. "Somehow, I couldn't seem to sell any papers, though people usually buy of me. The other boys are rough, and they pushed me down. I hurt my leg then, and when I cried, they laughed at me, and called me a baby. They said I wasn't any good for selling papers, and I am afraid I am not. I waited till most of them were gone, then I tried to sell out, but I didn't succeed."

"That's why I didn't meet you, Mamie. You ain't mad, are you! I was just coming now, and I expected you would be coming home. I thought if I met you part of the way it would be better than nothing."

"Brave Little Tim!" said the girl, as she held fast to his hand. "You are a hero, but you do not know it!"

"But, come! let's hurry home! They may follow me still!"

So they hastened along together, moving as fast as the lame lad's leg would permit. In truth, they walked much faster than he ought to have done, but he bravely endured the pain, asking:

"What do you mean by 'they'? I know you are frightened, Mamie, so tell me what has happened."

"Wait. I will tell you when we get home."

At length, they turned into a narrow alley, and they were soon at the door of a miserable tenement-house. Mamie sat down on the steps, saying:

"I must get my breath. It would never do for mother to see me now."

Tim sat down beside her.

The most of the people within the house were asleep, but from one apartment came the sound of a half-intoxicated man trying to sing a sentimental song.

For a little they sat in silence, and then a sigh came from the lips of the lame lad.

"What is it, Tim?" asked the girl.

"I was thinking how awfully good it was of you and your mother to take me in and give me a home," he said. "And your mother nursed me so good when I was hurt. What would have become of me, Mamie, if it had not been for her?"

"You would have been taken to the hospital."

"I think I should have died there."

"Perhaps not. They have nice doctors there and trained nurses. Perhaps they might have cured your leg so you would not have been lame at all; but we did not think it so very bad at first. The lameness came on gradually."

"Yes, and maybe nobody could have cured it. I'd like to be big and strong, like other boys, and then I could protect you, Mamie."

"For your own sake, I wish you were big and strong, Tim," said the girl, tenderly.

"What happened to-night—tell me!" urged the child.

So the little singer told him all. He interrupted by frequent exclamations of anger, and when she had finished, he was on his feet, his crooked little figure all atremble with passion.

"Oh, if I were a man!" he cried. "I'd find those fellows and whip them all! If I'd been

there, I wouldn't let them touched you, anyhow!"

"What could you have done, Tim?"

"I would have done *something*!"

"I am afraid you would have been unable to protect me. I should like to know who they were who came to my aid. I think there were but two of them, and there must have been six or eight in that ruffianly crew. I am so sorry they should get themselves into trouble on my account!"

"Those are the kind of fellows I like," declared Tim, a ring of admiration in his voice. "They're built of the right stuff!"

She had not recovered from her fright sufficiently to be amused by his enthusiasm.

"It is not likely I shall ever know how it terminated," she murmured. "I wish I might see my two friends and thank them."

"I hope they licked the stuffing out of them other fellows!" said Tim. "If I'd been there, I'd helped all I could."

The girl was silent for a little, and then she murmured:

"How I am getting to dread these dark streets at night! They fill me with horror. I am always seeing something that frightens me."

"Your mother—"

"She did not want me to sing on the Bowery—I know. But I had to do something, Tim. It is better pay than I was making in the store before I was ill and lost my place, and it is not so hard, though I do have to sing a lot of times during the afternoon and evening. It was dreadful hard work in the store, and there was not much chance of getting anything better if one stayed there a lifetime."

"But nobody insulted you there."

"You think so, Tim, but I was sometimes insulted a dozen times a day."

Tim was astonished.

"You never told me!"

"No, I did not tell mother. It was sometimes the finely dressed ladies who insulted me. You see, they thought me nothing but a common shop-girl, and so far beneath them that they could not insult me, if they tried."

"But you're good as the best lady in all the world!" stoutly asserted the boy.

"You think so, Tim; but you are inclined to overestimate me."

"No, I ain't! I beg pardon, Mamie; I did not mean to contradict. But you really are as good as any lady."

"Well, we will not discuss that. Had you been in my place and seen the looks of contempt they sometimes cast on me, you might have thought differently. And now—"

"Well, what now?"

The girl's voice grew a bit hard and bitter.

"What lady would care to have anything to do with a singer at a common variety theater? I do not wonder so much. I have never told you, Tim, but sometimes my soul rebels at the life. It is not so much the insinuating looks that are cast upon me from the front of the stage—I could stand that; but it is the company I am compelled to mingle with behind the scenes. You do not know anything about it, Tim!"

"Tain't anybody but the show folks, is it? I always thought show folks were ladies and gentlemen."

"The show people are not always the worst, Tim, though they are bad enough, and that is true. The girls all make sport of me and call me Miss Goodness Prim. They say I am too nice for their style, and they set some of the men to make love to me. I try to be decent, but their talk is almost more than I can endure, at times."

Her voice trembled and she seemed on the verge of tears.

The lame lad was thoroughly aroused, and his indignation found an outburst in a perfect torrent of words. Mamie was astonished at his display of anger.

"I just wish I was rich!" he said, in conclusion. "If I was, you'd never have to sing again, Mamie."

"Dear, noble Little Tim!" she exclaimed, taking his thin hands in hers. "I wonder if you ever think of yourself?"

"Oh, yes!" he confessed, with a sigh. "But, you see, I don't amount to much. I'm nothing but a cripple, anyhow, and money would be wasted on me. You are beautiful, Mamie, and so good! It seems strange you were not born rich. Somehow, it don't seem as if God planned out all these things just right, for—"

"Hush, Tim! it is wicked to say that! Mother says God does everything for the best."

She could see him slowly shake his head.

"I know she says so," admitted the cripple; "but sometimes I can't help thinking she may be mistaken."

"You must not think that way. You know she says we must trust in Him, and everything will come out right in the end."

After a short silence, Tim asked:

"What are you going to do, Mamie—how are you going to keep this from your mother?"

"Oh, I do not know, but she must not learn of it. She would not let me return to the theater, and you know how badly we need the money I earn. She is not strong—has not been strong

for a long time, and we would starve if I did not earn this money. I can see mother is failing, and—and—"

Once more her voice trembled, and he knew she was on the verge of tears. Softly his arm crept around her neck, and he kissed her cheek.

"Don't cry, Mamie—don't!" he whispered, his own voice shaking. "It hurts me so when you cry! It will make me cry too, and then my heart will ache worse than my leg or my back."

She wiped away the tears with her handkerchief.

"I will not cry, Tim," came firmly from her lips. "We must go up-stairs now, for I am quite composed, and I am anxious to know how mother feels to-night. But, not a word of what I have told you must you repeat to her."

Together they mounted the dark and creaking stairs.

CHAPTER V.

THE FIGHT AND AFTERWARD.

It was Walter St. Cyril who so neatly knocked down the brutal young rowdy who had assaulted the defenseless girl. He heard her cry for help, and, not pausing to consider the consequences, he plunged down the dark street and leaped in among the gang of ruffians.

Clarence Van Zile was at his back.

Now, although both young men belonged to what is scornfully designated by the slums as "de arrystocracy," they were members of a famous athletic club and in good training. Their swell clothes might have giving the casual observer the impression they were "sissies," but such an impression would have been erroneous.

With sweeps of his strong arms, Walter sent the startled rowdies reeling backward, and when he reached Tom Banton, the leader of the gang, he proceeded to knock the fellow down after the most approved style.

He was glad when he saw the girl escape into the darkness, for he understood a row was pretty certain to follow, and she might have been injured had she remained.

Howls of rage came from the ruffianly crew.

"Swipe 'em!" howled Tom Banton, struggling to his feet. "Down the fools!"

"Clarence," said Walter, calmly, "we're in for a fight!"

"It looks that way," confessed Van Zile.

Together they made an attempt to break through the ring of toughs by which they were hemmed in, but were not successful.

"Don't let 'em git'er way!" shouted Banton. "Knock ther corners offen ther jays!"

His companions answered his cries, and the two rash young fellows were forced backward.

"Back to back!" said Walter, grimly. "We'll have to fight it out that way."

In another moment they had assumed the position, and as fast as the toughs came up, they were met by telling blows from the hard fists of the two young athletes.

There was a wild hubbub on that dark street, and heads appeared at windows on either side. Still no one but those already concerned ventured to take a hand in the battle.

If ever the two youths did themselves credit in a muscular and scientific manner it was there in the gloom of that dark street.

"Come on, you cowardly crew!" cried Walter, as he sent the ruffians reeling back before his heavy blows. "We are good for the whole gang!"

"You are not dealing with a defenseless girl now," asserted Clarence. "Come up and take your medicine!"

But the young men were in greater danger than they knew. Infuriated by the blows they had received, the rowdies drew knives and pistols.

There was murder in the heart of more than one!

But, at this moment, a policeman's signal sounded at the corner, and immediately after, two officers came rushing toward the mob.

"Ware cops!"

That was the cry that went up, and, almost before the imperiled youths could understand it, the gang had scattered and they were left alone. They lost no time in joining the policemen and making a hurried explanation.

"Oi know thot gang," asserted one of the officers, speaking with a rich brogue. "It's not the firstst toime they hiv raised a roov around here, an' we'd better be gettin' out av this."

To give his words emphasis, a stone came whizzing through the air and struck his brother officer. So the two policemen and the young men lost no time in getting out of the dark street.

"Are you hurt, Clarence?" asked Walter.

"I think not much. Are you?"

"I do not remember of being struck but once; but we should have been hurt but for the opportune appearance of these officers. They had pulled knives on us."

"And pistols, too."

"Then you are lucky to get off with your lives, young fellows," asserted the Irish policeman's companion.

"Oi suppose we shill hiv to take yez in, me

lads, though it is moighty certun th' jedge will discharrge yez."

But the two youths had no desire to be "taken in," and they freely expressed themselves to that effect. When they explained who they were, it made a big difference with the policemen.

"I don't think it will be necessary to arrest them," said the Yankee officer. "They were only defending themselves from a gang of toughs, and any man has a right to do that."

The Irishman was easily convinced, and, within a short time, the two young fellows were back to Broadway. The entered the first saloon they came to, and washed their hands and brushed their clothes in the toilet-room, all the while congratulating themselves on getting off so easily.

Clarence had received a glancing blow on the jaw, and a slight abrasion of the skin was the extent of his injury. Walter had a slightly discolored swelling over one eye, but he declared it did not amount to anything, and when his hat was tipped to that side it was quite concealed.

"This is what I call a genuine lark," he laughed. "I declare I have not enjoyed anything so much for a long time! It was as good as a picnic, eh, old boy?"

"I think you must have found more sport in it than I did," confessed Clarence, as he deftly concealed his injury with a bit of court-plaster.

"Well, I do enjoy a row once in a while," asserted St. Cyril. It stirs a fellow's blood and warms him up. Life would be tame and monotonous without a rumpus occasionally."

Van Zile turned and looked his friend fairly in the face.

"You are the queerest fellow I ever saw, Walter. You never stop to think of the danger you may be running your neck into. You are all whew for excitement. Now, I like a fight well enough, but I don't care to be one of the parties. I had rather see a dog-fight or a prize-fight than anything else. That satisfies my thirst for excitement."

Walter made an exclamation of disgust.

"If there is anything I detest it is a prize-fight!" he asserted. "It is brutal and beast-like. Two human beings get up and pummel each other for a purse and the applause of a howling mob. They have no real reason for fighting, but they wish to be champions. Bah! None in mine, please!"

"Well, you are a queer fellow! Here you are coming down on prize-fighting with both feet, and within half an hour you have been engaged in a street brawl. I say, I can't understand your philosophy!"

"Well, I sha'n't try to make it clear to you, but to me it is plain enough."

"As clear as mud, I suppose!"

"You are not like me, Clarence."

"Admitted."

"We had a good cause for getting into a row to-night."

"So?"

"Yes."

"What?"

"The defense of a helpless girl. The prize-fighter has no such incitement as that. He fights for blood—for money and fame! Fudge! it makes me sick!"

Clarence laughed.

"Well, you are an odd chick! I don't think I ever understood you, and I don't know as I do now!"

"Perhaps not, but I do not see how I am to blame. This is not worth discussing now, anyway. Come, you are all right?"

Having washed their faces and hands and brushed their clothes, they sauntered out upon the street again, looking as fresh as if they had not been engaged in a desperate battle within the hour.

"I can't get that girl's face out of my mind, Clarence," asserted Walter, as they sauntered along.

"I wouldn't be so hard hit for a V!" laughed Van Zile.

"It's not that—"

"Not? Then what is it?"

"Well, I don't exactly know."

"I thought so. She was a pretty girl, Walter, but behold the quarter into which she descended! That is enough."

"What do you mean?"

"I should think you would understand. What kind of creatures do you expect to find in such a neighborhood?"

Walter turned and looked his companion fairly in the face.

"Old man, she is not bad!"

"Oh, come now, ha! ha! ha!" laughed Clarence. "And still you say you are not stuck! My boy, I never thought this of you—never! Why, you have any amount of society belles ready to fling themselves on your neck—they think you a grand, noble fellow, and all that. Now, you are broke up over the pretty face of a girl in last summer's clothes! Great heavens! it would be your ruin if it were known!"

"There, there!" exclaimed Walter, seeming on the verge of losing patience. "You make me tired when you tell about the society belles who are ready to fling themselves on my neck. What does a fellow want with a female who

stands ready to cast herself at his head! Those are not the kind to please my fancy. But you have a wrong impression concerning my feelings toward this pretty little creature we saw. I am not stuck on her, or anything of that sort, but I have taken an interest in her, and that interest is all the greater since I have found she may live down in that wretched section of the city."

Clarence said nothing, but there was a knowing look in his face—a look Walter did not like.

"That was not the face of one brought up in ignorance and misery," St. Cyril went on. "I am sure fate has been unkind to her, and that is why she was forced to such a miserable quarter. Perhaps her parents were well-fixed once."

"Oh, what is the use to speculate about her? You will never see her again!"

"Perhaps not; perhaps I may."

"The chances are against it."

"I know that."

"Let's go in here and have a beer."

"No, Clarence; I am not going to drink any beer to-night."

"Hello! sworn off?"

"No."

"Then what's the matter?"

"I simply do not want any. Now, do not be offended, old fellow."

"Are you getting goody-goody?"

"Well, hardly."

Van Zile grunted, and they continued their walk. For a little they were silent, but Walter seemed unable to banish thoughts of the pretty face from his mind.

"I will find out more about her, if I live," he muttered.

"That sounds well from the lips of Horace Morton's heir!" laughed Clarence.

St. Cyril started.

"I am not my uncle's heir," he asserted.

"You're not? Come, now! what kind of stuff are you giving me!"

"Straight goods, Clarence. I do not set myself up as an heir."

"But you are, just the same. He is broken down—an invalid—and he has not a living child."

"How do you know that?"

"How do I know it? Why, I should think it was plain enough!"

"Have you forgotten Harry?"

"He is dead."

"How do you know that?"

"There is no doubt about it."

"I have my doubts."

"You? Why, your uncle has given up hope!"

"Right there you are mistaken."

"But he has taken the case from the hands of the detectives, has he not?"

"From the regulars."

"Well?"

"But he has placed it in the hands of a private detective."

Clarence was surprised.

"Then that is pretty good evidence he is losing his mind!" he cried. "I have seen he was breaking down bodily, but I thought his mind was in good condition."

"And so it is."

Van Zile shook his head.

"Not if he has gone to fooling with a private detective."

"You seem to have a prejudice against them."

"They are only fit to shadow suspected women and boy criminals."

"I know that is the general opinion, but there is a difference in private detectives."

"I cannot agree with you. Any of them will sell themselves to the man with the biggest boodle. If Mr. Morton has taken the case from the regular force and given it to one of those sharks, it is certainly hopeless."

"The regulars were ready to give it up some time ago. They thought the child dead, without a doubt."

"And I believe it is, in which case you will be the heir."

"You forget my aunt."

"No; but it is possible I know a little more than you think I do. I know Horace Morton has sored on his beautiful young wife, and her chances of getting more than the regular widow's dowsy are very, very small."

Walter was silent for a bit, then he slowly said:

"It is not my habit to discuss these matters outside the family, but I do not mind you, Clarence, for you are a particular friend. I tell you frankly, I like my aunt, though she did marry Horace Morton for his money and the position it would give her. She has suffered enough for the step, I am sure, and the loss of her child nearly broke her heart. On that child she had poured all the love her husband failed to win from her—it was her life, her all. If she did not have hope that Harry would be restored to her, I do not believe she would live three months."

"Then I am afraid she is living on a false hope."

"I do not think the child is dead."

"I don't see how you can think otherwise."

"I have reasons to believe it was stolen."

"Another Charlie Ross case?"

"Yes."

Clarence shook his head.

"I hope you are not right, Walter."

St. Cyril started and looked at his friend in astonishment.

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I said."

"Why do you hope so?"

"For your sake."

"My sake?"

"Yes."

"I don't think I understand you," said Walter, very slowly.

"You are unusually slow, then, old man. It ought to be plain enough. If the boy is found, your chances will vanish. The wealth you might possess will go to him."

A firm look came over Walter's face.

"I have no right to my uncle's wealth," he said. "He is very kind to do so much for me, and I appreciate it, but I should feel like a robber if I took his property. If Harry is never found, my uncle's possessions should go to his wife."

Van Zile whistled.

"No," he said, "it is plain I have not understood you. By Jove! I don't understand you now! I know you are not foolish, old man, but I'll be banged if you don't talk that way! Right to your uncle's wealth! Why, man, you have a right to anything given you by the proper owner!"

"A lawful right, perhaps, but not a moral one."

"Come now, that is a quibble! What is lawfully right ought to be morally right."

"True; but it is not always so, by any means."

"Well, I do not think I would let anything of the kind trouble my conscience, if I were in your place. You will only stand in your own light, my boy."

"Perhaps. But I do not think I shall ever be called on to choose between what is lawfully mine and morally mine. I think the lost heir will be found. Did you ever hear of Detective Dan Downing?"

"Yes."

"He used to be on the regular force, but he has left it and set up for himself. He is the private detective to whom my uncle has intrusted the case, and if there is a living being in New York who can find the lost child it is Downing."

"Perhaps so. But here is my car, and I believe I will get home and catch some sleep. Good-night, old man. Do not lay awake thinking of that pretty girl in shabby clothes. Ta, ta."

"Good-night, Clarence."

They parted, Van Zile swinging himself onto the rear end of the street car.

CHAPTER VI. THE LOST HEIR.

WALTER ST. CYRIL did not lay awake thinking of the pretty girl, but he did dream of her all night long. She was always in some terrible danger from which he was trying to rescue her. Sometimes he succeeded in this, and sometimes he failed. Once when he had saved her and borne her from a fearful peril, her arms clung about his neck, and she whispered some words in his ear. He did not remember what they were, but when he awoke, he did remember the delightful thrill they had sent over his entire body.

The sun had long been streaming into his room through an opening in the draperies when he awoke. He did not immediately arise, but lay thinking of the adventures of the previous night. Despite the fact that he had passed through great peril, he laughed softly as he reviewed it all.

"Yes, I will see her again," he muttered, thinking of the girl. "I shall not be satisfied till I do. Her face was as sweet as a flower, but a flower would pine and die in the air of that quarter where she went. I am sure misfortune has cast her there."

Walter was young; the reader must keep that fact in mind. He was filled with the hot blood and enthusiasm of impetuous youth. The sober reason of manhood was something that only time could bring to him.

He arose and took a bath. Then he spent an hour dressing, for he was nothing if not a neat dresser. Everything had to be just so with him, but that "just so" meant a studied carelessness. He was very particular that there should be nothing stiff or prim about his clothes, and his careless air cost him more time than he would have expended in arranging everything regularly. His necktie must be neatly knotted, but he would undo it twenty times before he would allow it to appear studied and "pokish."

Perhaps Walter was a little vain, but then there are worse faults than vanity.

Another thing he would not allow was the crease down the leg of his pantaloons. He had noticed that everybody who tried to put on a "swell air" had their pantaloons pressed with the crease running down the legs. That was to give the beholders the impression those pantaloons were new, but Walter had observed many a pair had a tell-tale "bag" at the knees. The crease could not conceal that.

So Walter was very careful to tell his tailor

to always press that out of his pants, and the tailor spoke of him behind his back as a crank.

After descending from his room, Walter partook of a light breakfast and then inquired for his uncle. He was told the old man had been up more than an hour, and was in the library.

Walter sought him there.

"Good-morning, uncle," he greeted in a pleasant way. "How are you feeling this morning?"

A white-haired man with a stern and determined face was sitting—or reclining—in an easy-chair. A look of pleasure passed over his face as the young man entered the room.

"I think I am feeling some better," he said, but his voice was woefully weak. "I believe I shall be all right in a short time now. Doctor Bradman has given me some encouragement, and I think his method of treatment will be beneficial. It was no use, I had to give Doctor Eliot up. He was doing me no good, and he gave me very little encouragement."

Walter said nothing, but he could not help thinking one man had refrained from lying, and so lost a patient.

"You seem to be looking well this morning, my boy," said the aged gentleman. "My eyes are not so good as they once were, but they can see the flush of health in your cheeks."

"I never felt better in all my life, uncle."

"I am glad to hear it. You must take care of your health, Walter, for health is better than wealth. I would give all my possessions to be a young and healthy man again. I ruined my constitution rushing after wealth, but I do not mean that you shall have to do that, my boy. I will give you such a start as I never had in my younger days. Perhaps—if—if my Harry is not found—Well, you are all I have left."

The young man took a chair close by his uncle's side, and the old eyes were fixed lovingly on the manly young face.

"Do you want me to read you the news, uncle?"

"Yes, I have been waiting for you. There is the morning paper. Give me the doings of The Street first."

So Walter secured the paper and settled down to read the news for his uncle. This was his usual morning task.

Horace Morton had once been a shrewd operator on "The Street," and his ventures had brought him the wealth with which he had secured the luxuries by which he was surrounded in his declining years. He had always been considered clear-headed and shrewd, and his brain was as active as ever, even when bodily ailments forced him to retire from the fitful surge of Wall street. He did not consider his retirement permanent, firmly believing his trouble only temporary, and that he would return in a short time.

But he never went back: he was out of the mad scramble for wealth, and he might well be satisfied with the result of his shrewdness.

Nine years before the opening of this story Horace Morton married his second wife. By his first he had no children, and the good woman had been in her grave six years when the widower of fifty decided to take unto himself another Mrs. Morton. At that time, he looked sixty years old, at least, for nothing ages a man so swiftly as the nerve-straining life of Wall street.

Morton went into the country and married a girl of twenty. Her father and Morton had been schoolmates together, and David Evans had done a great deal to induce his beautiful daughter to marry the rich old widower, for the girl had no love to give the broker. She told him that, but he thought she might learn to care for him after they were married.

Thus the misalliance came about.

About a year after the marriage, the young wife became a mother, and Horace Morton was pleased when he learned the child was a boy.

Now he would have an heir.

Strange as it may seem, the child seemed to make a still wider breach between the broker and his wife. Both loved little Harry. In fact, on the child the mother poured all the affection her husband had failed to win. The babe became her all—a part of her very existence.

Between husband and wife the coldness increased. Sometimes he tried to bring about an understanding, but she always baffled him. She did not seem to want an understanding, so, after a time, he gave over all attempts, becoming still more absorbed in the pursuit of additional wealth.

The result of this was a breaking down of his health. It came creeping gradually over him, but he held himself up until the great calamity of his life befell him.

Little Harry was seven years old when he disappeared. That was about a year before the opening of this story. Everything had been done to discover what became of him, but his fate remained a mystery.

A certain street gamin, known as "De Weasle," told a story about seeing a boy gazing down through a half-opened manhole in the sidewalk. De Weasle declared the boy was on his knees and had his head in the hole, having lifted half the cover. The gamin asserted he was on the point of crying out to the boy,

when, of a sudden, the lad uttered a cry and pitched headlong into the hole, the cover closing with a clang behind him.

From the gamin's description of the boy it was thought he must be the lost Harry Morton. The police were aroused and men were sent down through the manhole into the dark sewer.

In vain they searched for the boy—in vain the mouth of the sewer down on the North River was watched night and day. If the boy fell through the manhole, he wandered away in the darkness of the terrible place and was soon overcome by sewer-gas or dragged down and devoured by the fierce rats which infested the underground tunnel.

The blow had nearly killed Harry's mother, but she did not give up hope. And, although Horace Morton was forced to retire from active business, he still clung to the belief that his boy might be one day restored to him. He thought the child had been stolen by villains who were holding him till the search was practically over and would then come forward and demand ransom money.

With this belief in his mind, he had advertised all over the country, stating any sum would be paid for the restoration of the lost heir, and "no questions asked."

But even that failed to bring back his boy. The police struck clew after clew, and when they were traced down, they all amounted to—nothing.

As the days crept by, the lines grew deeper in Horace Morton's face and his hair became more silvery. By every one but himself it was seen that his best days were past. He always believed there was a great deal in store for him in the future.

Perhaps it was a singular thing their grief did not draw the husband and wife more closely together, but the chasm still remained between them. They lived beneath the same roof, they met, they bowed, sometimes they spoke—and that was about all.

Thora—that was Mrs. Morton's name—was a beautiful woman with a wistful, yearning sadness in her great dark eyes. She seemed to live in the past—or was it the future?

Walter St. Cyril and Thora became friends, but he had never yet ventured to speak to her of the breach between herself and her husband. Once or twice he had nerved himself to do so, but something in her manner prevented. There was a calm dignity about her that made him feel how presumptuous he would be in referring to a family matter of such a delicate nature.

The detectives had tried to "pinch" De Weasle and make him cut his fingers, but the gamin stuck to his story about seeing a boy fall into the man-hole.

After nearly a year had passed and the fate of the lost heir still remained unexplained, Horace Morton decided to take the case from the hands of the regulars, and place it in those of a private detective of whom he had heard wonderful tales.

Dan Downing—Double-voice Dan—was said to be one of the most remarkable ferrets in Gotham. He had made an enviable reputation for himself when on the regular force, but had decided there was no chance for him to make money unless he went it alone on his own hook. That decision had caused him to withdraw from the regulars.

Horace Morton gave Dan the case, and the detective promised to do his level best to solve the secret of the boy's disappearance.

After Walter had read the news to his uncle, they sat and talked for some time. He ventured to ask if anything had been lately heard from the detective.

"No," answered Mr. Morton, with a sigh, "nothing of any moment. It has been a very long time since Harry was taken away."

He always spoke of the lost child as "taken away."

"Nearly a year, uncle."

"Yes, nearly a year, and every year counts on me now. I had hoped to have my boy with me as much as I could, but this bitter blow has robbed me of that. I am all alone in the world, and—"

"Uncle!"

"Yes, Walter—yes, yes! I know you are here. But for you my condition would be most wretched."

Walter noticed the old man's hands shook as he lifted them and fumbled at his neatly-tied cravat. There was no doubt about it, Horace Morton was breaking down swiftly. Unless his child was soon restored, he would never see him. Morton had lived "the pace that kills," and at sixty, he was as broken down as a man of seventy-five should have been.

"If Harry does—not come—back—" began the old man; but Walter interrupted him:

"You had better not think of that now uncle. We still have hopes he will be brought back, alive and well."

"Do you really think he will?" eagerly asked the broker.

"I hope so, uncle."

"You are a fine young man, Walter, a fine young man! You shall not lose anything by your kindness to me."

"Do not speak of that, uncle. Have you not done enough for me already? It is I who am in debt. You have been a father to me since my real father died."

"And you have seemed like a son to me."

Walter arose and paced the floor, his slippered feet making no sound on the rich carpet. There was something on his mind of which he wished to speak to his uncle, but he did not venture then. At length, he said:

"I think I will go out and get a mouthful of air, uncle."

The old man made no objections, and he was soon bounding up the stairs, two at a time.

At the head, he came face to face with Mrs. Morton, who was just issuing from her chamber.

"Good-morning, Walter," she said, pleasantly.

"Good-morning, Aunt Thora," he replied.

She made a gesture of disdain.

"Please don't call me 'aunt!'" she entreated, holding out her hand. "I do not like it."

He was surprised.

"What shall I call you?"

She looked him straight in the face.

"Call me Thora."

Somehow, he felt strangely ill at ease.

"Very well," he said, as lightly as possible.

"Thora it shall be."

"Thank you, Walter."

With that, she passed down the stairs.

Walter watched her till she was near the foot of the stair-case, then he turned to his room, muttering:

"I do not understand that woman. Sometimes I respect and admire her; sometimes I am tempted to hate her. I know uncle has been a harsh and stern man, but is he fully to blame for the breach between himself and the woman he calls wife?"

That was a question he was not ready to answer.

Ten minutes later, as he descended the stairs again he heard loud voices in the hall. When he reached the bottom, he saw a woman who was talking angrily to the butler. The female was dressed in sealskin and silk, but the veil that had been drawn away from her face revealed a countenance flushed with drink. That she had once been beautiful was evident at a glance, and dissipation had not entirely robbed her of her beauty.

"I will see him!" she was saying. "Show me to Mr. Morton. He will not dare refuse to see me!"

"It is impossible, madam, for it is against his orders that any one be admitted. He does not wish to see any one."

"Then let me see that young wife of his. I have something to tell her that will make her ears tingle."

The butler hesitated, and Walter appeared at this moment.

"Madam," said the young man, quietly, "you have evidently made a mistake in the house."

"Who are you?" the woman demanded. "Are you boss here? I tell you I will see one of them. I need money, and will have it!"

"I hate to tell you so," said the young man, "but you are intoxicated. Hadn't you better go away and come again when you are in a more respectable condition?"

She flashed him a savage look, muttered something under her breath, and then, to his surprise, suddenly turned and went down the stone steps.

CHAPTER VII.

TWO OF A KIND.

THE woman did not look back. Straight down the avenue she went, seemingly utterly unconscious she was being watched from the steps of the house to which she had been refused admittance.

Walter St. Cyril wondered if he had better follow her, and quickly decided he had.

Swiftly securing his hat and cane, he hurried out, having no time to pause for putting on his gloves. This he was forced to do as he walked along swiftly, meaning to get near enough so the woman could not slip him by suddenly mingling with the throng on some crowded street.

"I wonder if this is the person from whom my uncle has been receiving letters which went unopened into the fire?" he muttered. "It is easy to tell the kind of creature she is. Adventure is stamped on her face."

It was plain to him she did not fear being followed, and that made his task all the easier.

"I believe she has some kind of a snap on Uncle Horace," thought the young man. "I would give something to know just what it is. She would not have dared come to the house in such a condition unless she had felt as if she had a pull of some kind."

Suddenly a man stepped around the corner and confronted the woman. She had drawn down her veil, but he planted himself directly in her path. He made a pretense at dressing well, but his face and nose proclaimed him for what he was—a drunken bum.

"Good mornin', Moll," he saluted.

The woman attempted to pass without replying, but he suddenly caught her by the wrist, saying fiercely:

"None of that, old gal. I know you, an' you know me. Don't sling on any airs, now!"

The woman glanced hastily around, as if to discover if they were observed, and a smothered exclamation came from her concealed lips.

"What do you want?" she demanded.

The man laughed, shortly, harshly.

"That's right. Now, you are coming to your senses," he nodded.

"Take your hand from my wrist, sir!"

"All right, Moll; an' don't ye try ter scoot, 'less ye want me ter take after ye."

He released his hold, but still stood in her path.

"Will you allow me to pass?"

"Not much!"

"I will call a policeman!"

"Oh, no; you won't do that!"

He actually laughed at the idea.

"You are assaulting a lady on the public street!"

"A lady! Well, that is good!"

"You wretch!"

"Come off, Moll! you make me tired! You know me."

"I do not!"

A look of rage transformed the man's face. He bent forward and glared at her in a manner that would have frightened a nervous woman into a hysterical condition.

"I'm no fool, Moll," he growled. "I know you've bin tryin' ter throw me over, but ye can't do it. See?"

Again the woman glanced around, and she seemed relieved by the fact that they had apparently attracted no attention.

"Oh, ye're skeered for fear some one will see ye," nodded the man. "Well, I don't keer a hoot who sees me."

"You're a miserable wretch, Ben Sukes!"

"Oh-o! So you do know me, arter all! Well, I thought so. Now, have a little sense, old gal!"

"Why did you stop me here on the street?"

"Business—business, you bet!"

"I cannot stand here and talk with you."

"I don't see how you can help it."

"I will call an officer."

"Oh, no ye won't!"

"I will—"

"You don't dare. It will be a mighty bad thing for you, if you do!"

"Do you threaten me?"

"Only when you force me to. I tell ye, Moll, I'm not to be fooled with. I am a desperate man, an' I don't care a darn for myself. But you— Well, you had best look out for Molly Sukes!"

"Sh, you fool! Don't talk so loud!"

The man showed his teeth in a wolfish grin.

"Don't like ter have that name applied to ye, eh? Well, you call a policeman and see how quick I will tell him who you are. The police are looking for a certain shoplifter that used to hang out on Sixth avenue, and her name was—"

"Stop, Ben! What do you want?"

"I'm not loaded with wealth."

"You are after money?"

He nodded.

"You alwus was a sharp one, old gal. If it wasn't for that veil, I'd be tempted to kiss you for old times."

An exclamation of disgust came from her lips, and she fell back a step. Once more she glanced anxiously around, but those who were passing had not noticed anything unusual in the couple on the curb.

"I thought I was well rid of you, Ben Sukes," she hissed, her breath causing the veil to flutter. "You gave me your word you would trouble me no more, and—"

"You was fool enough to believe me! Moll, I'm afraid you hain't so sharp as I alwus reckoned."

"I paid you well to get rid of you."

"That is a fact," he calmly admitted.

"Now you cross my path again."

"Sure. But I have had a serious time gittin' to cross it. You have been hard to find, my dear. What is your name just now?"

She did not heed the question, but went on, speaking swiftly:

"This thing has got to stop, Ben. I have no further use for you—"

"But I have for you."

"You gave me your word."

"Did you ever know me to keep it?"

"No," she said, sneeringly; "you are a born liar, and you will die one!"

"Thanks—many thanks. I acknowledge the soft impeachment, as the poet says. But this is not business, Moll."

"Don't call me that! I have dropped that name forever."

"So? Well, you decline to tell me the colors you are sailing under now, so what can I do? I have it—I will call you 'my darling.'"

"Ben, I have no money for you."

"Rats! That story won't wash! I took the trouble ter foller you till I saw you go into the old jay's nest up the street. You didn't go there for nothin'."

"But that is what I got."

"Tell that to ther marines!"

"It is true."

"Then somethin' must be ther matter with ye. What's the tr'ub'?"

"I did not see the old man."

He looked at her in a doubtful manner, and then he shook his head. She hastened to say:

"It is true. I was refused admittance."

"And you let 'em bluff ye?"

"For the time—yes."

"Well, you're a good one! What's ther matter with ye? You must be losin' your grip?"

"No; but I chose to return another time. The old bird has been refusing to be plucked of late."

"Ah?"

"Yes; he has paid no attention to my letters."

"And you are about to make a kick?"

"Yes."

"That's right, my darling. Kick—kick hard! You have the snap, and you can make the old jay come down in great shape. But, meantime, I want you to distinctly understand that I'm in it once more. Do you catch on?"

"But I have no money to give you."

"Oh, come off your perch! You were alwus loaded with the stuff."

"But I have been seeing hard lines of late."

He laughed incredulously.

"Excuse me if I decline ter take stock in that yarn. When you git inter hard lines it will be when you have lost your cunning. Now, I am not going to take a bluff, old gal, and the sooner you tumble to that the quicker. See?"

"How much do you want?"

"Now that is sense! I want a snug little sum, and I must have it. I've bin in hard luck of late, an' things have run against me. I was a winner for awhile, but the trick turned the other way."

"You gambled away the money I gave you?"

"Well—I spent it in riotous living, I must confess."

"And you said you wanted it to open a saloon—you declared you would never trouble me again."

"My darling, I confessed to you a short time ago that I am a little troubled with untruthfulness. The saloon was simply an invention to enable me to git ther scads from you."

"And you dare tell me this!"

"Easy—easy, old gal! You are gittin' excited, and you will attract attention. Simmer down and fork over. I need two or three hundred."

She fell back.

"Two or three hundred! I have not that much in the world, Ben!"

"What is the use, my dear? I know you too well. Now, the easiest way you can get around this matter is to come down."

"If I don't?"

"Well, there is a certain old white-headed fool who would pay well for the little story I could tell him."

That cut her deep. She caught her breath and her hands trembled. He doubted not that she turned pale, but the veil concealed that, if she did.

"The foul fiend seize you!" she hissed. "You would ruin everything!"

"Not if you use me white."

"Use you white! Heavens, man! what do you call white? Have you not lived off me? You were nothing but a common laborer with a handsome face and figure when I first saw you. What have I done for you?"

"You didn't jest put that in the shape of a question, but I'll tell ye what you have done. You made me a crook, a drunkard and a loafer! That is about the size of it, my dear. I was an honest man when I first saw you, earning my bread and feed by hard labor. You fell in love with me and—"

"Made a fool of myself! But, this is no place to discuss these things. We have stood here too long already. I have no money for you now, but I will send you some."

"That won't do."

"It will have to. Where can I hit you?"

"I am hanging out at Jackson's on the Bowery. But I need money now, old gal, an' must have it. I am dead broke and in debt. I've got to git money."

"Well, why don't you crack a crib?" and the woman lowered her voice.

He laughed shortly and shook his head.

"Oh, no! oh, no! I'm not goin' inter that while I can get along some other way. That thing would please you too well, my lady. Then I would stand a fine chance of being pinched and run in. In that case, I would be out of your way for a time. No, my dear, I am not turning burglar this week."

She uttered a sneering exclamation.

"You have not the grit, Ben, that's the matter with you. But you have had your fingers on other jobs that would send you further than the mere cracking of a crib, if the police knew it. For instance, there is that one—"

"You needn't trouble ter speak of 'em, my dear. You were in 'em with me, and so you should have nothing to say. Let's drop it. Just you come down with the scads, and—"

"I will give you what I can spare now, Ben, and that will have to do."

"Where are you livin'?"

"That's none of your business."

He uttered a growl.

"Oh, it hain't! Well, I beg to differ! If it hain't my business, whose is it? That is what I want to know."

She did not reply, but, opening her purse in a covert manner, she extracted a small wad of bills. After a careless glance around, to make sure they still remained unwatched, she thrust the money into his hand, saying:

"Take this. It is the best I can do now, but I will send more to you at Jackson's. But I warn you not to trouble me again. I have no use for you, and I do not want to see you. That ought to be plain enough."

"I is, my darling, it is! But it sometimes happens that we have more than we want of certain things in this world. Did you ever think of that? I will tell you now that I am not going to be shook. You may as well make up your mind to that. As I told you, you made me what I am, and now you will find me a stayer. This money will not last me more than twenty-four hours, for I have debts, and—"

"Why pay your debts, you fool!"

"They are gambling debts, old gal, and must be paid. If they was any other kind, I might skip 'em. As it is, I'll pay 'em up."

"Well, I don't care what you do with the money. You had better make it go till I send you more."

Without another word, she turned and walked away.

Walter St. Cyril had witnessed the meeting, but he had been unable to hear a word of the conversation that passed between them, much to his regret.

The man waited till the veiled female had passed quite a distance down the street, and then he started after her, muttering:

"She refused to tell me where she is living, but I will follow her and find out."

He did not dream he was also followed.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN A BOWERY DIVE.

"JACKSON'S" is one of the tough places on the Bowery. It is an excellent place for respectable people to keep out of, to say the very least. Some hard stories are told about the things done at Jackson's, and, if half of them are true, more than one crime of which the police have no record has been committed there.

From the front it has the appearance of an ordinary beer saloon. There is a front bar, a sawdust covered floor and about so many loafers hang around the place.

But, if you are "in it," you will not stop at the first bar you come to, providing you wish to see Jackson's. That is but a small part of the place. Go on, pass through a door and along a dark passage. If you have plenty of money in your pockets and are "new" in the place, you want the eyes of a hawk or an owl when you pass along that dark and narrow way. But, if you have money in your pockets and are "new" there, you have made a big mistake in going there. The quicker you can get out, the better it will be for you.

If you get through the passage all right, and the time is evening, you will come to a dimly lighted and smoke-filled room at the foot of a flight of stairs. Look out not to fall down those stairs. You will betray the fact that you are drunk or "fresh" there, if you do.

It is a cellar, and the ground is covered with sawdust. There is a bar at one side, and it does a rushing business. At the further end is a stage with a curtain that slides on a wire. On that stage a free "entertainment" is given every evening. It is not a high grade show, but it pleases the people who frequent Jackson's.

Around the room are scattered nearly a score of round tables. There are chairs at each table, and the visitor is expected to sit down. He is no more than seated before a waiter is at his side to take his order. He is expected to drink something, and paying for the drinks fills the place of paying an admission fee. If he orders beer, he can be as long as he chooses in drinking a mug of the stuff, but the mug is immediately refilled as soon as it is emptied.

There is a great deal of gambling in the cellar, but a stranger never gets away with any large sum which he has won. If he attempts it, there is sure to be trouble and he stands a good show of getting "laid out."

There is a back entrance to the cellar; it is called the "ladies' entrance." Yes, it is a fact that females are seen in the cellar night after night. They come there with masculine companions and drink such stuff as their escorts can afford to purchase for them.

The evening following the opening of this story found the two sports, Dandy Mac and Ted the Tipper, seated at a table in Jackson's cellar. Half-emptied mugs of beer were before them and they were smoking some black cigars. Their heads were close together, and they were talking in a low tone, so their conversation would not be heard by the throng on every side of them. The entertainment was going on, a croupy libel on the good old-fashioned negro minstrel making a murderous attempt to sing the latest sentimental song, "The Picture That's

Turned Toward the Wall," accompanying himself on a three-dollar banjo.

"I wonder who dat cove could 'a' bin," The Tipper was saying. "I thought it was de cop w'en he came whoopin' down on us."

"It was no cop."

"Dat's straight, but who was he? I hain't had sech a scare for a month."

Mac laughed.

"Your nerves are weak, Ted."

The dapper dandy looked hurt.

"It ain't dat, pal," he asserted. "But it was a shaker ter see a cove come jumpin' toward us in dat way jest w'en we'd downed de bloke."

"Well, it was startling," acknowledged Mac.

"I noticed you took to yer heels quick enough," grinned The Tipper.

"It was high time. But I would give something to know how bad I hurt that fool when I struck him. I hope his skull was cracked. I would have fixed him in another minute, if that other fellow hadn't come down on us."

"I should say so!" nodded Ted. "Why, youse was goin' ter cut him!"

"What did you think I was following him for?"

"Dat was more'n I could make out, Mac. I didn't know w'at you could want of such a duffer in rags."

"Well, I had my reason for wanting to do him. Never mind what that reason was. I hope he will never cross my track again. It will not be healthy for him, if he does!"

Ted shivered. There was a light in the eyes of the Dead Game Sport that made The Tipper feel a cold chill creep along his spine, and he thought he did not want Marlton Edgewood for an enemy.

By way of turning the conversation, the little dandy said:

"Well, we lost der gal las' night."

"Yes, but there are plenty of other nights coming. She was nothing to me after I spotted that man. Curse him! why didn't he die?"

Mac was in an ugly mood, and he gnawed savagely at the end of the cigar.

The Tipper had no desire to return to that subject, and he was saved from making another attempt to get on a different track by the appearance of a stout young fellow who had his derby tipped far down over one eye. With a grunt that served as a salutation, the young fellow dropped into a chair at the table, coolly asking:

"Who's standin' drinks?"

Mac gave the new-comer a stare, and then he observed:

"Well, Tom, been knocked out again?"

"Naw," was the reply.

"You have two beautiful black eyes. How did you get them?"

"Fell down and stepped on 'em," was the reply. "Who's shoutin'?"

Edgewood scowled.

"You will have to treat yourself, my cove," he said. "A fellow with your uncivil tongue can't expect to bum all the time. His best friends will shake him after awhile."

The young tough with the black eyes leaned forward and glared at the cool speaker.

"Looker here, Dandy Mac," he growled,

"I've never had no trouble with you, but I hain't swallerin' that! I'm no bum!"

"For heaven's sake what are you, then?"

"Are you lookin' fer blood, Mac?"

"Not exactly."

"Then button up, or I will put a head on you!"

The Dead Game Sport laughed, sneeringly.

"Tom Banton, you are not built right. If you tried it, I would make those eyes look worse than they do now, so go slow. You can be civil, if you try hard, and you know it's for your good to keep right with me. I have helped you out of more than one scrape."

The young ruffian had seemed on the point of leaping at Edgewood's throat, but at these words, he dropped back in the chair.

"That's so," he confessed, after a time. "I hain't got no call ter have a row with you, Mac. I'm in a mighty bad way ter-night, an' 'most anything starts my rile."

"Now you are coming to your senses, Tom. Waiter, one beer here."

"You're ther white stuff, Mac," nodded the young rowdy. "I don't mind tellin' you how it was. You see, I got after a chip last night, and some coves laid fer me. There was five or six of 'em as jumped me at once. I backed up against a wall and punched them as fast as they came up. I knocked them all out, but I got these two beautiful eyes in the scrap."

Mac laughed.

"Tom," he said, "you're a gorgeous liar!"

Banton started up, angry again, but at that moment the waiter placed the beer before him. The sight of the foaming beverage seemed to pacify him, and, with a harsh laugh, he sunk back and took the drink.

"I'd knock ther face offen any other livin' man thet'd said that ter me," he declared, lowering the mug after a long pull.

Just then an Irishman and an Italian ran into each other close by the table.

"Bad 'cess ter yez!" cried the son of the "Auld Sod," who seemed to be slightly the

worse for the liquor he had been drinking. "Ye dirthy-faced blatherskite av a chistnut-vinder! doon't ye know betther thin ter roon into a gintleman in thot way? Be me saoul! Oi'll knock th' two oies av yez inther wan!"

"Gitta outa da way!" cried the Italian, shrilly. "Noa gitta outa da way, gitta run over-r-r, lika da steam-car."

"Oh, Oi will, eh? Well, be th' powers! thot is more thin Oi kin shtand fram a Dagol! Look an' see me learrn him betther manners."

"Coma righta on, Bog-a-trotter-rr!" cried the Italian, squaring off. "I am da vera bada mana to foola with. I knocka da corners offa da Irishmana."

There seemed a good prospect for a fight.

CHAPTER IX.

SOMETHING OF A SENSATION.

INSTANTLY there was a ripple of excitement, for there was nothing the frequenters of Jackson's loved more than a fight.

"Go fer him, Irish!"

"Stan' up ter him, Dagol!"

"Give him a swipe in de jaw!"

"Down with the Dagol!"

"Hoe in, you suckers, an' have it out!"

"Wait a bit thill Oi git off me coat," said the Irishman. "Thin Oi'll show yez the koinde av a marn Oi be."

"Noa taka offa da coata," grinned the Italian. "I licka da Irishmana, coata and alla!"

Then the son of Italy began to dance around his enemy, flourishing his fists and making feints.

"Hoold on!" cried the paddy. "Whist a bit, Oi tell yez! Oi carrn't foight wid me coat on!"

"Come offa da peacha!" advised the dusky belligerent. "Noa play da tricka ona mea. I have-a alla me teetba sprout. Gitta ona da style of mea. Bada mana, you betta!"

The spectators whooped with delight.

"Oh, this is better than a circus!" cried one, as a ring was formed around the two men.

Then both the Irishman and the Italian were once more urged to wade in and break themselves all up.

"Will some wan hoold thot joompin-jack thill Oi kin git me coat off?" inquired the Irishman. "Oi doon't dare thry it noow, ier he'd take me foul."

"Noa toucha mea!" warned the Dago. "I cleana outa da place. I tella you I am bada mana."

"Chestnuts!" shouted a voice.

"Chestnutta—who say chestnutta? Da maka da fun of me-a, da gitta da jaw broke-a."

But the spectators were not to witness a fight. Jackson himself had heard the disturbance, and he sent two or three men to quell it.

"Dry up this!" commanded one of the men.

"The boss says shut off. The police will be down on the place if we raise too much of a racket. Choke off there, or you two will get fired!"

The Irishman was not at all willing to let it drop there, but the Italian did not mind. However, when the Dago asked the Irishman to drink with him, it was as good as settled. Ten minutes later, the two were making merry over their beer, having taken a table near the two sports and their companion.

"Well, dat was a fush!" said The Tipper, in disgust. "I counted on seein' some sport. Dat's der way—w'en dere's goin' ter be some fun, alwus some cove has ter spoil it!"

Banton cast a contemptuous glance toward the dapper dandy.

"If there was any fun, you wouldn't be in it," he sneered.

"Now, are you trying to pick a fuss with Ted?" inquired Mac. "You seem to be spoiling for a quarrel, Tom."

The young bully denied this, and just then his mug was replenished, whereupon he took a "pull." As he sat down the mug, he seemed to observe:

"I s'pose you fellers will stand in tergether since doin' that little job last night."

The sports exchanged startled glances, and then Mac suddenly caught Banton by the wrist, hissing:

"What do you mean by that?"

"Mean by what?" asked Tom, in surprise.

"What you just said."

"I didn't say anything."

"Come now, don't squawk! What did you mean by speaking of the job last night?"

"I never spoke of any job."

"I heard yer," asserted The Tipper.

"Look here!" and Tom half-arose. "If you fellows are looking for a row—"

"We ain't looking for any row, but, if you've got anything to say, talk out straight."

"Dat's der stuff," Ted seemed to say. "If youse has got any talk ter make 'bout dat job, make it straight."

"Shut up, you fool!" commanded Edgewood, his face growing black. "Your tongue is too long, Ted!"

"Why, I hain't said northin'!" assured The Tipper, in astonishment.

"You've said too much."

"I didn't wiggle my jaw."

"You did, fer I heerd ye," nodded Banton. "What is this job, anyhow?" "Murder!" Ted seemed to instantly reply. For a moment Dandy Mac was aghast, and then he reached forward and caught the little sport by the collar.

"You infernal fool!" he snarled. "Do you mean to blow on me?"

"There hain't no need for him ter blow," Tom Banton apparently said. "Everybody knows about it. What had the fellow done that you should try to down him?"

"By Moses! I'll throttle you both!" came savagely from Mac's lips.

"That will only be another murder on your hands," declared a voice that seemed to come from beneath the table.

The startled sport fell back into his chair, and then he looked under the table.

There was no one there. Beads of cold sweat suddenly started out on Edgewood's face and a feeling of horror seized him. Then, at his very ear sounded a laugh that was like the rattling of dry bones, followed by these words:

"The day of retribution is coming! Paul Norcross did not die amid the mountains of Colorado! He has trailed you down!"

"Am I bewitched?" gasped the shaken man. "Is all this but imagination? No, no! I heard those words as plainly as I ever heard anything in all my life. What does it mean? Am I haunted, or is some one playing a trick, on me?"

He began to believe it was a trick, but who could be carrying it out! He looked suspiciously at his two companions, but they seemed innocent. Those nearest the table were the Irishman and the Italian, who now seemed the best of friends.

"Noa lika goa round witha da hand org," the Dago was saying. "Too harda da work. I sella da hand-org, sella da monk, take-a da mon', setta uppa da chestnutta stand. I sella da roast chestnutta. Gooda da job in da warm weather-r-r; noa gooda in da cold. Den wish hada da mon', like-a Jay Goulda. Hadda da mon', cutta da swell."

"On, yis!" laughed the Irishman; "you'd make a foine swell, me b'y! You ought ter learrn th' barber's trade, an' thin you'd be an Eyetalian count, begobs!"

"Noa like-a da hair cutta."

"Whoy?" "Too cleana. Keepa da handa alla clean make-a da shampoo—keepa da handa all tender. Den have-a wear da glove in da cold weather-rr. Noa gooda!"

Tom Banton's attention had been drawn toward the Irishman, and, with a sudden spring, the young rowdy reached the side of the son of the Emerald Isle. Swiftly clutching the Irishman's mass of red whiskers, he gave a jerk that caused them to come off, revealing the fact that they were false.

A smooth-shaved, clear-cut, determined face was thus exposed.

"Look!" cried Banton, exultantly, calling the attention of every one within the door. "This Irishman's that infernal detective, Double-voice Dan!"

Then there was something of a sensation in the cellar.

CHAPTER X.

A BOWERY MOB.

A HOWL of astonishment and fury came from the lips of the toughs, and they sprung to their feet.

At the same instant out shot the unmasked detective's fist, and he sprung forward as he delivered the blow, sending the weight of his body to assist the muscles of his arm.

It was a terrific blow, and it caught the Bowery bruiser "right where he lived."

Tom Banton was hurled to the floor in a dazed condition, that kept him from arising for a short time, and made him think the building had fallen on him.

"The doors! the doors!" yelled the gang. "Don't let him get out!"

It looked as if Double-voice Dan was in a trap.

"Down wid dem!" screamed Tipper Ted, as he saw the "Dago" place himself at the side of the unmasked ferret. "Dat oder mug is in wid der nipper!"

"This way, partner," coolly said Double-voice Dan, as he backed toward the stage. "We can't get out the regular way, for they have received the alarm in the saloon above before this."

A handsome man was this Ventriloquist Detective. His face was rugged and clean-shaved, his eyes black and piercing. He stood about five feet ten in his shoes, and he was built like an Apollo.

"We are in a bad scrape!" said the man who had been playing the Dago.

"Bad enough," confessed Dan, grimly. "But I have seen worse ones."

Now Dandy Mac took the lead. Up to this moment he had seemed undecided, but now he sprung forward, crying:

"Come on, boys! We'll fix these spotters!"

The gang was instantly at his back, and they

would have dashed upon the two men had not the detective drawn a revolver and taken a bead on the Dead Game Sport.

"Go slow, you devils!" cried Dan, his voice ringing out clear and commanding. "I will bore a few of you, if you try to run us down."

"And I will assist in the boring," asserted the "Dago," a long-barreled revolver appearing in each hand. "We will send some of you on a mighty long journey. I happen to be able to shoot with each hand, and shoot to kill."

"Gods!" gasped Dandy Mac, falling back, his face growing pale. "It is Paul Norcross!"

"You are right," came the retort; "I am Paul Norcross, Marlton Edgewood, and I am here in New York to meet you. I owe you a debt which I shall repay—a debt of hatred. You left me to die, but I am still alive! I have followed you for a long time—I have searched everywhere for you. Just when I was ready to give up in despair, I found you. You tried to kill me last night, but I am a hard-man to kill, you dog!"

"Curse you!" grated Edgewood. "You will never leave this room alive!"

"Nor would you, were it not necessary you should live for certain reasons. I would shoot you like the cur you are! Even now, my heart longs to send the bullet into your brain! A grain more pressure on the trigger of my right-hand weapon would do that, and you would fall dead in your tracks."

Dandy Mac had always been considered a man of nerve, but he began to tremble as he heard these words. He crouched and cowered like the wretch he was.

The blood of Paul Norcross was up; he thirsted for the life of the man who had wronged him—the false friend of other days. For a moment he forgot himself.

"Come out here, Marlton Edgewood!" he suddenly shouted—"come out here and meet me face to face! I will fight you, and you shall have a fair show! That is more than you deserve. Come out—"

Double-voice Dan checked him.

"Are you crazy, man?" cried the detective. "What show do you think you would receive in this place?"

That brought Norcross to his senses.

The two men had retreated till the stage was close behind them. Now, there seemed no way for them to go further. Despite the threatening weapons, the mad mob was pushing forward.

"Down wid dem!" howled The Tipper, once more. "Dey's makin' fer der back way!"

"Der perlice may git down on us!" shouted another Bowery tough.

This gave Double-voice Dan a plan of action, and, quick as thought, he began on it.

"Yes," he cried, "the police will be here in less than two minutes. They ought to be here now."

"We are here!" was the cry that came from the end of the room opposite the stage. "Open this door! Let us in!"

The voice apparently came from behind the door at the foot of the stairs, which had been made secure at the beginning of the excitement.

"Open this door!" was loudly repeated. "We will burst it down!"

"My God!" exclaimed Tipper Ted, his face becoming like chalk, for he was a pitiable coward. "It is der coppers, sure! Dey're onter us!"

Every eye seemed turned on the door from behind which the cry had seemed to come, and the mob expected to see it broken down in another instant. They stood awaiting the appearance of the police, but no police came, and no further sound came from beyond the door.

One of the gang threw back the heavy iron bolt and swung the door open.

No one was there!

For a moment every man seemed dazed. Then a cry went up, as they understood they had been tricked, and they whirled toward the detective and his companion.

No, not toward them, for they were no longer in the room!

They had disappeared!

"Infernal fools!" shouted Dandy Mac. "You have allowed them to get away!"

"Der detective played it on us!" cried Tipper Ted. "Dat was one of his double-voice racket-ets!"

Yes, the ventriloquist had drawn the attention of the mob away long enough to enable himself and his companion to lightly spring upon the stage and hurry out at the wings.

As The Tipper's cry went up, the sound of a racket and loud voices came from the rear of the stage.

"Dey're behind der scenery in dere!" exultantly yelled Ted.

Then the gang made a mad rush for the stage, howls of rage coming from the lips of many.

Behind the scenes there was a crash, and then a burst of flame.

An oil-lamp had been dashed into a score of pieces!

Out into the face of the mob rushed several men and women, all screaming with excitement and fear.

"Fire! fire!" was the cry that went up.

Two of the men had attempted to stop the escaping detective and his companion. The scuffle that followed had caused the breaking of the lamp, and the blazing oil had started what might be a serious conflagration.

The escaping men were instantly forgotten by the greater portion of the crowd.

"Send in an alarm!" howled a stentorian voice, and the mob surged back from the blazing stage.

"The place is done fer!" cried more than one, and a rush for the stairs followed.

Without delay, an alarm was rung in.

Out on the street a crowd began to collect, as the men came rushing from the saloon. The police attempted to keep the people moving, but they were unequal to the task.

It was but a short time before the place was surrounded by a Bowery mob.

It is not often it takes long for a fire call to be answered in New York. Before half the crowd knew what the excitement was about, the clang of the fire-gong was heard.

"Clear the way!" was the cry.

Down a cross-street came a prancing pair of white horses, drawing a glittering engine that was dropping sparks and breathing black smoke. It was a beautiful sight, and the crowd shouted its enthusiasm.

But, look! As the throng gives the engine the street, a cripple lad was seen trying to hobble away.

He tripped and fell, directly in the path of the oncoming engine, which seemed about to be turned into a juggernaut of death! It was a terrible sight, and a great cry of horror went up from the spectators.

The horses were almost upon the lad.

Suddenly the figure of a man dashed into the very teeth of death, and, almost as the feet of the horses were touching the unlucky lame boy, he was snatched away. By the breadth of an inch the heavy wheels missed the man who had so gallantly risked his life for an unknown cripple. He was not hurt, though he staggered and fell.

Many hands were outstretched to lift him. He was soon on his feet, and when the crowd saw he was unharmed, a wild cheer went up.

"Hold on! hold on!" yelled some one. "It's only a Dago!"

"Dago or not, he saved th' kid!" cried another.

In truth the rescuer seemed like an Italian, but it was Paul Norcross in disguise. Some of the mob who had been in Jackson's cellar recognized him, and, while pretending to wish to express their admiration for his bold act, they crowded upon him and tried to hurl him to the ground. Had they succeeded, he would have been trampled upon by a score of feet and might have been killed. He knew he was in deadly peril, and he fought them off.

Double-voice Dan was not far away, and he saw the peril of his comrade.

With a loud shout, he charged into the mob, hurling men to the right and left. Within a minute he reached the side of Norcross, and then they fought their way out together.

"Skip!" cried the detective in the ear of his friend. "If you don't, you will have twenty reporters down on you and the papers will all have the story to-morrow. I will go one way; you go another. We will meet at the office."

Not a moment was lost in carrying this out, and Norcross soon succeeded in getting clear of the crowd. He was hastening away when he heard a shrill voice calling:

"Oh, say, mister!"

He looked back and saw a little figure hobbling toward him.

It was the lame boy he had saved from the feet of the fire-horses and the wheels of the engine.

CHAPTER XI.

LIMPY TIM'S STORY.

THE lame lad hurried forward as fast as he could, quickly reaching the side of his rescuer.

"I want to tell you," he panted.

"You wanta tella mea?" said the man in some surprise, falling into the Dago dialect.

"Yes. You saved me, didn't you?"

"I pacca you uppa when you falla down. You gitta hurta when da horses runa ovar-rr you. You noa make-a da gooda pavement."

"Then you saved my life, sir, and I want to thank you, if you are a Dago."

"You t'anka mea! Oh, come-a off! Noboda t'anka mea! Da kicka mea; da noa t'anka mea."

"But I thank you. I can't pay you any other way, for I'm only just a little kid what sells pape's on the streets, and I have to take all the money I get home to Mrs. Winter."

"You take-a da mon' home? Dat gooda plan. Putta da mon' in da bank; grow uppa take-a da flyer-rr in da Wall streeta. Make-a da bood'-gitta richa."

"Come-a on now. Dago gotta gita out of this. Dago have da enemies backa there. They wanta Dago's skina. To keepa his skin, he must hide-a. Ketcha da on!"

He took the boy by the hand, and they moved

away together. They had not gone far before they heard the fire engine signal "all out."

"Well, the place did not burn, after all!" muttered the man, absent-mindedly.

The lame boy was astonished.

"Why—why!" he gasped. "You don't talk like a Dago!"

"Don'ta talka—Greata Scotta!" Then he stopped suddenly and was silent for a brief space, at the end of which he burst in a fit of soft laughter.

"Well, I gave myself dead away that time, didn't I?" he chuckled. "It's all right, for I don't want to play that part any more. I am not a Dago, my son, far from it!"

"Then who are you?"

"A homeless wretch whom nobody cares for."

"Oh, is it so bad?"

"That is about the size of it."

"I am sorry for you, for I have a good home with Mrs. Winter and Mamie."

"Who are they, relatives of yours?"

"No; they are just friends. I live with them, and I sell papers to do what I can toward earning my living. I don't get very much, 'cause the other boys are so much smarter than I am. When I am trying to sell a paper, they run right in ahead of me." The little voice quivered a bit as the cripple said this.

"Well, that is mean of them," said Paul Norcross; "but it is the way of the world. What is your name, little fellow?"

"Tim, sir."

"Tim what?"

"Nothing, sir."

"Tim Nothing? Well, that is an odd name!"

"I did not mean that, I meant there was nothing but Tim—unless it is Limpy," he added, after a pause. "The boys all call me Limpy Tim."

"What is your father's name?"

"I have no father."

"So? No mother?"

"No, sir."

"Well, well! I am interested. So you are one of the waifs of New York? How does it happen you are with Mrs. Winter?"

"She took care of me when I was hurt. I was run over, sir, and that is what makes me lame."

"How long ago was this?"

"About a year."

"And Mrs. Winter is no relative of yours?"

"No, sir."

"Well, she must be a good woman!"

"Oh, she is!" Tim quickly declared. "She is just the best woman that ever lived! And Mamie is good, too."

"Who is Mamie?"

"Mrs. Winter's girl."

"By Jove! I am getting interested in you and your friends, Tim. What did you do before you were hurt?"

"I don't know."

"Don't know?"

"No, sir."

"How is that?"

"I can't remember. You see, I was hurt about the head, and I have never been able to remember much of anything that happened before I was run over."

Paul whistled softly.

"I have heard of such cases as this," he said; "but I did not think I should ever stumble upon one. I am more than ever interested in you, Tim."

"Thank you, sir."

"You are a polite little fellow, and you speak wonderfully good English for a lad reared in the streets. Tim, I begin to smell a mystery about you."

"Do you really?" cried the lame lad, mortified. "I take a bath twice a week. I didn't know I smelled. Some of the boys smell awful when it is real hot!"

The man laughed heartily.

"It is not that I mean, my lad, for I reckon you are clean enough.—Which way are you going?"

"Up this way. I must meet Mamie. I didn't meet her last night, and some mean fellows followed her. They would have hurt her if some other fellows had not pitched in and helped her. Then there was a fight, but Mamie ran. If I'd been there—"

"Well, now, if you had—what?"

"I would have done all I could to help the fellows what stood for Mamie."

"Of course you would! It is too bad such a brave little heart should not have the body of a Hercules."

"Who is he?"

"Oh, he was a big, strong man."

"I'll bet Sullivan could lick him!"

"Sullivan—well, that's good!" Paul laughed again.

"You needn't laugh," said Tim, soberly. "Anyhow, I'd put my money on John L.—if I had any."

"Well, you won't have a chance. Sullivan will not meet Hercules."

"Well, that won't be John's fault. I suppose Hercules is afraid of him."

"Not a bit."

"But he won't fight?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"He has been dead several thousand years."

"Oh, my! You've been guying me!" cried Tim, reproachfully.

Paul was enjoying himself immensely, for there was something about the lame boy that he liked. The little fellow had a frank, innocent way, and was gentlemanly in his manner.

"This way," said Tim, drawing the man along; "this is the way to the place where I meet Mamie. I'm going to meet her every night now, for she does not dare go home alone. She has not told her mother about last night, for Mrs. Winter would not let her come if she knew."

"What does Mamie do?"

"She sings."

"Sings?"

"Yes; and oh! you ought to hear her! She can sing like a bird, and she is so pretty! If you come along, you shall see her."

"Where does she sing?"

"At Benter's and Bloom's, on the Bowery. They run a cheap museum and theater, you know."

"And she has to sing there? It is too bad—too bad! Does she like it?"

"Oh, no, sir! she just hates it, but she gets a whole dollar every night."

"A munificent salary! And she has to furnish her own dresses and live out of that?"

"Yes. But she has some dresses her mother used to wear when they were well off. They were made over to fit Mamie when she sings on the stage, and she looks lovely in them."

"Then they have been well off?"

"Oh, yes; real well off once. That was before Mr. Winter died. They came here all the way from England."

"So they are English?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, Tim, I am greatly interested in you and your friends. I do not look very presentable, but I should like the pleasure of walking along home with you and Mamie to see that no harm comes to you to-night."

"Oh, you can do that, sir."

"I will walk behind, for it is not probable Miss Mamie will care to be seen with a man who looks like an Italian chestnut-vender."

"Oh, she's not proud—Mamie isn't! Why, sir, there was a poor old negro woman as slipped down on the pave one time when I was with Mamie. Before I knew it, Mamie was helping her up and asking if she was hurt."

"Then Mamie is the kind of a girl I admire. But I will not be presented in this condition. I simply want to make sure she gets home all right to-night. At the same time, I will discover where you live, Tim, and thus I will be able to call on you when I am in better trim."

"All right, sir. Here we are at the stage entrance. We will wait here in the shadow for her to come out."

CHAPTER XII.

WALKING INTO THE TRAP.

WALTER ST. CYRIL found it no easy task to keep his game in sight. In turn, the man Walter was following found it something more than fun to keep Moll, the adventuress, from giving him the slip.

The woman knew she was followed, but she resolved she would trick the tracker. She had no desire to again become associated with Ben Sukes.

From the avenue she turned out upon a thickly-thronged street, but even there she was unable to foil the trailer. Her heart was hot with anger, but she took good care not to have the appearance of knowing she was followed.

Of a sudden, she came face to face with a man she knew. He would have passed without recognizing her, but she made bold to speak. With a few hasty words, she let him know she was followed and wished to throw her pursuer off the track. He must help her.

He dared not refuse.

She told him to hire a carriage and have it at the curb. He was to give the driver certain instructions, and then he must stand near the carriage, so she would know which one it was.

Meantime, she would go into a dry-goods store close at hand. When she came out, everything was to be ready.

The plan was carried out faithfully. She disappeared within the store, but came out again in about ten minutes. The carriage was at the curb and the man was near at hand.

Without an instant's delay and without glancing at the man who had rendered her the assistance, she hastened into the carriage. In a moment, the driver whipped up his horse, and the closed carriage went whirling down the thronged thoroughfare, dodging here and there amid the teams and soon mingling with many others so it was impossible to identify it.

Ben Sukes saw through the trick as the woman hastened into the carriage, and he attempted to get another carriage to follow, but he was not quick enough. When he did secure the attention of a driver, he was unable to point out the carriage he wished followed.

Almost frothing with rage, Sukes sought for the man who had assisted the adventuress in giving him the slip. But that individual had vanished in the throng.

"I'd punch his bloomin' head if I did find him!" raved Ben, forgetting he was attracting the notice of the passers-by. "Well, I'll turn my 'tention to that mug as has bin follerin' me. He's Old Boodle's nevvie, an' he's jest ther chick I've been wantin' to git my grip on for a long time."

Just then a ragged and dirty street gamin, who was smoking a cigarette "snipe" with the air of a "Johnnie," called to the angry man:

"Hello, Sukesy! W'at's der matter wid yer? Dey'll have yer 'carserated in der loonertic 'sylum ef yer goes roun' der streets mutterin' like dat. Shake yerself out, old mug, an' git a brace on! Youse got der snakes, or else youse off yer bias. Dat's w'at's der matter wid youse."

"Hello, Weasley!" exclaimed Sukes, in delight.

"You are the very kid I want to see."

"Well, yer see me don't yer? W'at's gnawin' of ye, Sukesie? Youse looks like yer'd bin bit by a dawg. W'ere's de high shiner yer used ter wear? Hessome bloke swiped it?"

"Look here, Weasley," said Ben, collaring the ragged lad. "It's business I want to talk with ye. See?"

"Well, I guess. Let her slide, old mug."

"I'm follered."

The ragged urchin whistled, a knowing look coming into his crafty eyes.

"W'at yer been doin', Ben?" he asked, glancing around. "W'at has der cops got arter yer fer now? Say, I dunno's I want ter be seen in your company. Let up on my collar, will yer?"

"Hold on, you little fool! it's not ther perlice that's arter me."

"Well, it oughter be."

"None of your sass, Weasley!"

"Come off yer perch, Sukesie! Dey can't nobody sass youse!"

The man scowled, but he instantly said:

"Look over across the street on ther next corner above."

"O. K."

"What do you see?"

"Natty young blood in der gray suit."

"That's right."

"W'at's der matter wid him?"

"He is following me."

"W'at—not der feller standin' dere smokin' der cigar?"

"Yes."

"Well, w'at der you care? He ain't no spotter."

"He is a spotter on his own hook. Don't look at him that way. I want him to think he is not observed."

"Well, I don't jest drop ter der racket. Give us der p'int."

"There are no points. All there is about it is that he's follerin' me."

"Well, why don't youse give him der shake? You kin do it, ef yer wants ter."

"I don't want to."

The gamin was astonished.

"Den w'at is chewin' yer?"

"I want him ter foller me, and I'm afraid he won't."

"Ob, dat's it!"

"Yes."

"Well, w'at hev I got ter do about dat?"

"I want yer ter help me."

"Rats!"

"I am in earnest."

"Well, w'at yer take me fer?"

"A shrewd young rascal."

"Den yer oughter know I hain't fool ernough ter go inter dis game fer fun, an' I hain't workin' fer love now'days."

"I'll pay ye."

"Bet a snipe ye're dead bus'ted wide."

"Instead of that, I'm flush. Look here," Sukes covertly showed the roll of money he had obtained from the woman.

"My eyes!" gasped the urchin. "Some bloke has been touched!"

"I got it in a square deal."

"Come down!"

"It is so, but it don't make any difference to you how I got it."

"Not ser long as I kin git me fins on some of der stuff."

"Which you kin if you'll lead that chump to the place where I tells ye."

"Say, boss, I'm in it. How much do I scoop?"

"A dollar to start with, and another to finish."

"I'm your huckleberry!"

"All right. Here, take this. Don't let him see you. Now, he may suspect."

"I was afeard of dat."

"We can fix it."

"How?"

"I'll give you a shakin' out and you must pretend to be mad with me."

"Yes."

"Then I'll skip into the crowd. Ten chances to one, he will speak to you. You must tell him you can take him to the place where I hang out."

"All right."

"Then it's settled?"

"All but der place where I'll take him."

"Take him to Grogan's, over on East Fifth street. You know the place?"

"Well, I should cough! Count on De Weasley."

"I'll pull him in, if it kin be did. Jest you give me a stiff shakin' an' dump me in der gutter. Den you kin skip, an' I'll wool der jay. Go on wid der fun."

The next moment the passers-by paused in surprise to see the man vigorously and angrily shaking the boy, whose shrill cries of rage and fear attracted general attention.

"You confounded young rat!" fumed the man, in apparent rage. "If you ever attempt to steal my watch again, I'll have your hide flung out of this now, or I'll turn you over ter heperlice!"

"Oh, leggol leggol!" squealed the gamin. "I didn't do nuthin', mister, dat's der trut! I ain't der covel. Don't lick me! Ef ye do, me broder Bob'll smash ye der next time he sees yer! Leggol leggol!"

Sukes did "leggol," and De Weasle went whirling into the gutter.

There were some sympathetic persons who said it was a shame, and some who thought it served the ragged urchin right. De Weasle picked himself up, and wiped his eyes with his dirty coat-sleeve. It happened there was no policeman near.

Ben Sukes lost no time in mingling with the crowd and disappearing.

The whole affair had seemed very natural, and Walter St. Cyril was deceived. He attempted to follow the man, but Sukes gave him the slip, and then he turned back to see the gamin.

De Weasle almost run into him. The crafty gamin was still sniffling and rubbing his eyes.

"Hello!" exclaimed Walter. "Did he hurt you much?"

"It hain't dat," answered the ragged little rascal. "I don't care so much about de hurtin'."

"Well, what is the trouble?"

"He didn't come down."

"Come down?"

"Yes."

"What do you mean?"

"He didn't shell out."

"Shell out what?"

"De scads."

"Then you struck him for something?"

"Yes, an' he said I tried ter swipe his ticker. He hain't got no right ter use me dis way. I knows him."

"Ah?"

"Well, I oughter! He wus spliced ter me mudder 'fore she died, an' lef' me a homeless orphun."

"Is he your father?"

"Naw!" cried De Weasle, in apparent disgust. "If he was, I'd go tako a soak off de dock! He's only jest my step-dad. My ole gent was a big gull, you bet! He was an alderman. He got inter some kind of a snap an' dey said he'd swiped a boodle. I dunno how it was, but dey was goin' ter send him up, den he was taken sick an' died. Der doctor said it was suicide, but I seen der ole lady put der stuff in his coffee."

"What old lady?"

"Why, der old gal—me mudder!"

Walter was horrified.

"That was terrible!" he exclaimed. "Did you tell what you saw?"

De Weasle winked craftily.

"Dere hain't no flies on me," he asserted.

"You didn't tell?"

"Not any!"

"Why not?"

"Well, I didn't mind der old bloke's goin'. He never used me none too well, an' me mudder was alwus kind ter me. She was a good woman, wid a tender heart, an' she couldn't stan' der disgrace of havin' a jail-bird husband. Dat's why she done him up. She was sharp, dat woman, an' I lost me best friend w'en she died."

Here the wretched little liar began to sniffle again.

"What was the cause of your mother's death?"

De Weasle threw back his head, and he seemed to be all atremble with anger.

"Dat bloke knocked her down der stairs. She was dead w'en she struck der bottom."

"Heavens! Wasn't he punished?"

"Naw. He swore she took a tumble. Dey let him off an' he kicked me out. I've bin hustlin' since dat time. Oncet or twicet he did give me a plunk, but he wouldn't do dat ter-day. An' den he said I tried to swipe his ticker! Well, I'll git square wid him 'fore I die, see 'f I don't!"

"Do you know where he stops?"

"Do I? Well, I sh'ud cough!"

"Where is it?"

"Over on East Fifth street. But looker here; I hain't no boorow of inflammation! See?"

"I see. But it may pay you to talk."

"Den I'll warble; odderwise nixey."

"I'll give you a dollar to show me where this man lives on East Fifth street."

"Show der color of yer cash, me covey."

Walter immediately gave De Weasle a silver dollar.

"Dat's der stuff!" chuckled the shrewd ramin, delighted at his success. "Shall we loof it?"

"No," answered Walter, signaling to a driver. "We'll take a cab."

In a few minutes they were rolling over the paving, while the young man still continued to ply the ragged boy with questions. De Weasle was equal to any emergency, and he told some wonderful but plausible tales during the trip. Whenever Walter approached dangerously near something the boy did not wish to talk about, the young rascal would find some way to turn the drift of the conversation.

At length, they reached a place where Walter decided to get out.

"We will walk the rest of the way," he said.

It was a wretched quarter. Misery and want was to be seen on every hand. There were bleary-eyed men, slatternly women, and ragged, dirty children.

De Weasle led the way.

Walter could not help thinking he would not care to foot it through that quarter late at night.

At length they reached East Fifth street, and well down by the river De Weasle pointed out the place where he declared Ben Sukes lived.

"An' dere he is now!" cried the gamin, pointing to a man just disappearing within the doorway.

"He looked this way," said Walter. "I wonder if he saw us?"

"Of course he didn't," answered the boy. "If youse wants ter see him, now's your time."

Walter hesitated. He did not particularly care to enter that disreputable-looking house, but De Weasle assured him it was all right.

"Der place is run by a nice old lady," unblushingly assured the young student in crime. "Sukes is der only bad man in der whole place, an' he's soft as velvet w'en he finds he's got a man ter deal wid. If youse wants ter see him, now's yer time, fer he may not be dere ag'in fer der nex' week."

Walter did want to see the fellow, for somehow he felt as if he was in a way to clear up the mystery of certain letters his uncle had received—letters which had gone unopened into the fire. Sukes was friendly with the woman who had called at the old broker's home and demanded admittance, and Walter felt as if he must know who that woman was.

"All right," he said, after a few moments' thought. "I will see him. I'm not afraid of any one man."

"Den foller me," said De Weasle, and he led the way into the wretched place.

Walter followed.

CHAPTER XIII.

FOUR TO ONE.

STRAIGHT into the trap he walked.

The gamin made his way up an unsteady flight of stairs, where it was unpleasantly dark. Walter felt his flesh creep as he thought of what might take place there in that gloomy place. The stairs groaned beneath their feet.

"Dey don't sling on much style here," observed De Weasle; but dey're bloods, jest der same, bet yer plunkers! I'd rudder be a blood dan a snob, an' dere's a heap of dif'rence."

Walter said nothing.

At the head of the stairs they turned into a narrow passage, that was also dark. In a few moments they came to a door, on which the boy rapped.

"Come in," called a hoarse voice.

The gamin threw open the door, and Walter entered.

The room was not much lighter than the passage had been, and the young man saw a figure sitting by an old table. There was only one window in the room, and that opened to an air-shaft. All the light obtained came from the air-shaft.

"Dat's yer man," declared the gamin, as he closed the door.

The figure by the table arose.

"Well," he growled, "w'at do ye want?"

Then Walter remembered he had not thought to ask the man's name. He turned to speak to his guide, but De Weasle was not there. He had closed the door and remained on the outside.

That seemed odd to the young man, but he did not show any alarm.

Instead, he calmly turned to the man, saying:

"I came here to see you."

"Well, you can do that, if you have a pair of eyes in your head."

"I beg your pardon, but it is difficult to see anything here. Why don't you light the gas?"

"Gas! Ho, ho, ho! Well, that's good! Gas! Mister, I hain't no Jay Gould! We don't burn gas here!"

"All right; no offense."

"Mebbe not."

"I saw you on the street to-day."

The man grunted.

"You were talking with a woman."

"Well?"

"I wish to know who that woman is, and so I came to you."

"Why didn't you go ter her?"

"I do not know where to find her."

"Would ye go to her if ye did?"

"Surely."

"You've come to me—for just what? Talk right out."

"Well, I want you to tell me all you know about this woman."

"Humph! Do you take me for a fool?"

"Not at all."

"Then for what am I to blow?"

"You will find it very profitable."

"Well, you're a fresh duck! Say, you're old Morton's nevvie, eh?"

Walter was startled. The man knew him!

"Morton—what Morton?"

"Come, come, now! that won't go down! I know ye! I've seen ye more than once. Don't try to fool me, young feller, for it won't be at all healthy! I'm a bad man when I get started, and it doesn't take much ter start me. I'm not feelin' very chipper this mornin', anyway, so tread easy."

"There is no need of making this kind of talk, sir," and Walter began to grow indignant. "If you care to answer my questions, you shall be well paid; if you do not wish to answer them, I will go."

"Don't be in a hurry."

The words were uttered in a sneering manner, and the young man felt a cold chill creep over him. He had advanced but a few feet into the room, and now he stepped backward toward the door.

"Hold on!" cried Ben Sukes. "You hain't goin' now. I want to talk with ye a little."

"What do you want to say?"

"I want to borrry what money you have handy 'round ye."

Walter laid his hand on the knob of the door. He was convinced a trap had been laid for him. The thought became belief.

As his hand touched the door, it was flung open, and the next moment Walter was hurled forward on his knees.

Two men and De Weasle entered.

Sukes leaped toward the youth as he went down, but Walter was on his feet in an instant, and the ruffian reeled back before a terrible blow from his hard fist.

"Down wid him!" howled De Weasle. "Dat's de mug! Swipe him, yer chumps!"

The other men leaped toward Walter, but he dodged around the table.

"Shut ther door!" commanded one of the men.

De Weasle hastened to obey.

"Now we've got him!" snarled Sukes, shaking his head like a furious buffalo. "That was a side-wynder he let me have. Come on, boys—at him!"

"Keep off, you dastardly curs!" cried Walter, his voice ringing out clear and distinct. "It will be the worse for you if you lay a hand on me!"

They laughed in derision.

"Ye're in a trap, my covey," asserted one, "an' ye may as well simmer down."

"Yes, take a tumble ter yerself!" squeaked the gamin. "Dis hain't no Sunday school crowd."

"You treacherous little rat!" grated the young man. "You led me into this trap!"

"Well, I jest done dat same," chuckled De Weasle. "Youse a dead easy mug ter fool."

The three men were advancing toward Walter, who had his back to the wall. He saw his chances were few, and he resolved on a desperate rush. In another moment he leaped toward the door.

"Stop him!" howled Sukes.

The other two men struck at the desperate youth, and one hit him. He staggered, recovered himself, and then returned the blows.

It was a lively fight that ensued, and De Weasle laughed and shouted with delight.

"Dis is a reg'ler hustle!" he howled, bending and placing his hands on his knees. "Go at him, ye duffers! My eye! dat was a hot one! He does swing a nasty fist! Bet he'll lick de gang now!"

Indeed, there seemed a good prospect that Walter would prove too much for his foes. He sent them reeling and cursing back as fast as they leaped upon him. He fought to reach the door, and he succeeded.

It was fastened!

Leaping backward, he prepared to hurl himself against it. Just then he was sent staggering against the table, Sukes having dealt him a telling blow.

With a crash, the table went to the floor.

Shouts of delight came from the three men, and they flung themselves upon the youth.

"Dat's der stuff!" laughed De Weasle. "Now youse have him! He can't do a— Great Jinks! he can, too!"

To his feet arose the young man, shaking off the clinging men. In his hand he held the leg of the table, which he had twisted free. He swung it aloft, and the next instant one of the three ruffians was knocked senseless to the floor.

Then De Weasle took a hand. He darted between the youth's legs, and Walter again crashed to the floor.

In going down, he struck his head heavily and was stunned.

Cursing savagely, Sukes and his uninjured companion again leaped upon the gamy young man.

CHAPTER XIV.
SUKES IS SOCIABLE.

WHEN Walter fully recovered, he found himself bound hands and feet and seated in a chair. He looked around. Two of the men and the treacherous gamin had disappeared from the room. But Ben Sukes was there.

"Well," growled the crook, taking a seat in front of the captive; "you did make a lively hustle, but we was too much for ye."

Walter did not speak. He could not trust his tongue just then, and he tried to keep back the words which demanded utterance.

"Oh, ho!" mumbled Sukes; "so ye're goin' ter play ther deaf an' dumb, eh? Well, I don't care. I guess you'll come round soon."

"We scooped ye in in great shape. You tumbled inter the trap slick, as I thought ye would. I wanted to git ye right where ye be now."

"Well, now that I am here, what do you want of me?"

"Oh, you can talk? Well, I thought so. Now we can come to an understanding."

"Will you answer my question?"

"Don't be in a hurry; there's lots of time ahead of us. You're young and hot. You'll simmer when you git older."

"And you're apt to find this the most expensive job of your life!"

"Oh, you're in no shape to make threats."

Sukes chuckled. He seemed to enjoy the situation, and that filled Walter with rage. Had he been free, Ben Sukes would have been handled roughly.

"You're just the boy I've been wantin' to git my hands on for a long time," the rascal went on, calmly lighting a cob pipe and puffing clouds of vile smoke into the captive's face. "You're old Morton's neevy?"

"Yes."

"He's kinder picked you up arter he lost that brat of his. I s'pose you're contin' on getting a good slice of his wealth when he knocks under?"

"That is no affair of yours!"

"Hain't, eh? Well, it just is! It don't make any dif' just how you done it, but you cut off a boodle I was gittin' out of the old fool, though it came to me second-handed."

"I cut it off?"

"That's what I think."

"What makes you think so?"

"Well, just after he coddled you and took ye inter his home, the money stopped comin'. I couldn't stan' that, an' Moll couldn't stan' it. It made us split. She wasn't gettin' so much swag, and so she flung me over—give me the slip."

Walter was interested, and Sukes must have seen it in the young man's face, for he quickly added:

"Mebbe I'm talking too much. I have been drinkin' pretty free, but don't you think I hain't playin' my cards for all they are worth. When I saw you was follerin' me, I made up my mind to go it alone. Now I have you tight and fast, Moll can go to grass. I sha'n't want nothing of her, for I mean to make your old fool of an uncle shell down in great shape."

Walter's breath was nearly taken away by the boldness of the scheme. He could scarcely believe a man in his senses would dare attempt such a thing in a place like New York.

Was Sukes in his senses? Had not liquor robbed him of his reason?

The rascal seemed to read Walter's thoughts, despite the gloom of the room.

"Oh, I hain't so big a fool as you may think!" he nodded. "I know it's a desperate trick I'm playin', but it hain't the first I've tackled. If I scoop a good boodle out of this, I'm goin' ter git out of this country and go where I can live quietly. I'm gittin' old and I ought to have something for a reward for my toil. Moll was a stay and support, but I can't depend on her any more. I've got to go it alone."

"Well, what are you telling me this for?"

"Oh, I thought I would. Now I know what you're countin' on."

"You say you do."

"Well, I do. You mean to turn the dogs of the law down on me when you break away."

Walter was silent.

"I knew it," nodded Sukes, and then he laughed in a disagreeable manner. "Mebbe you won't git the chance."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, I never did crack a skull yet, but it hain't too late for me to begin."

The captive shuddered.

"You devil!"

"Thanks—many thanks," came calmly from the rascal's lips. "Moll advised me to crack a crib, but she never thought I'd go into so big a job as this. I'll run across her line of business, and then she'll tear her hair. Well, what could suit me better? She cast me over, and I'd like to beat her at this game. I will!"

"You will end your career on the gallows."

Sukes shrugged his shoulders.

"I'll look out for that."

"This piece of work shall cost you dear!"

"It hain't your place to threaten, and you'd better keep a civil tongue."

"I do not fear you."

"Oh, you're a brave boy!"

"And you're a coward!"

With a growl of anger, Sukes bent forward and struck the helpless youth in the face.

"That proves it!" quickly came from Walter's lips. "Only a miserable coward would dare do such a thing!"

"Take care, you young fool! I'm in a ugly mood just now, and I may lay you stiff!"

"You are bold enough about threatening now, but how would it be if I was free? You would not dare—"

"Oh, drop it! I confess you're a perfect tiger to fight, but it's not that we're talking about."

"I don't know what you are talking about anyway. I do not see the drift of your talk."

"It's only a little social conversation. I'm the most social cove alive. After goin' through your clothes and gatherin' in your loose change, I felt like sittin' down and entertainin' you for a while."

"Thank you for nothing. Your room is a great deal better than your company."

"Think so?"

"Yes."

"Well, you may change your mind. I reckon you'll git mighty lonesome before you go out of this house—if you ever go out!"

Walter said nothing. He felt as if his situation could scarcely be worse.

Sukes arose and whistled shrilly.

"You don't make very good company," he declared; "so I guess I'll get rid of you."

In answer to his signal, the two men who had aided in Walter's capture came in.

"Gag him," ordered Sukes.

A gag had been prepared, and they immediately attempted to force it into the captive's mouth. Walter resisted, and one of the fellows grasped him by the throat.

"Open up, or I'll shut off yer wind fer good!" he said.

Walter kept his jaws closed till everything swam around him and balls of fire seemed bursting in his head. Then a black shadow seemed to drop before his eyes, and he lay limp in the hands of his brutal captors.

CHAPTER XV.

DETECTIVE DAN AT HOME.

THE morning following the rather stirring adventures in Jackson's, on the Bowery, Detective Dan Downingsat in his office, which was a plain and rather scantily furnished room.

He was without disguise of any kind, and his smoothly-shaved features were free to the scrutiny of the man who sat in a chair facing him.

Dan had been examining some papers and letters, but he now paused to offer his companion a cigar.

"It has been some time since I indulged in such a luxury," half-laughed this person, selecting a weed from the extended box. "Tramps usually have to smoke snipes, if they smoke anything at all."

"Well, you do not look much like a tramp now," said the detective.

"Thanks to you. This is the first time I ever knew of a detective becoming a dispenser of charity."

"It is not a common thing."

Dan's companion was the wretched-appearing tramp who had accosted the two sports at the stage entrance of the cheap Bowery theater, but he did not look at all like the same man. Then he was ragged, unshaved, wretched, hungry and desperate. A day had changed him into a clean, well-pressed and presentable sort of person.

It was plain to see the man had been handsome in his youthful days, but friction with the rough side of the world had changed him somewhat. There were lines in his face, although he was still young, and streaks of silver appeared in his hair.

This was Paul Norcross. He had a keen eye and a determined manner. His face was rather stern, but there was something magnetic about the man. He looked like one who would be a good friend—a firm friend—and an uncompromising enemy.

Dan Downing was not a man who readily "took" to strangers, but, after hearing Paul's story, he had helped the unfortunate man and given him such assistance as was in his power. He found Norcross quick to "catch on," adaptable and able to assume a variety of make-ups, as he had been a famous amateur actor in his youth and had really possessed talent.

As for Norcross, he knew Dan had saved his life, and he was ready to show his gratitude. He felt himself indebted to the detective more than he could express by words, and, being more a man of acts than words, he longed for some way to show his appreciation.

Thus it came about that, disguised as a Dago, Norcross had appeared in Jackson's, on the Bowery, with Downing. The detective was greatly pleased with the manner in which Paul had played his part, but, not being an impulsive man, he did not openly praise the Westerner.

As they smoked their cigars, Dan observed:

"Norcross, you scarcely seem like the ragged tramp with the western dialect whom I first saw on the Bowery two nights ago."

"Well," said Paul, "I assure you, I scarcely feel like the same man."

"What was your object in assuming that dialect?"

"It was simple habit. I fell into that way of talking while I was in the West, and, as it seemed to suit the character of a vagabond, I did not drop it when I returned East."

Dan was silent for a bit, while he studied his companion's face. After a time, he nodded a bit, and then he said:

"I think I can use you, Norcross, if you do not object to being used."

"By you I do not, so long as the purpose is honest."

For a brief instant, it seemed as if the detective was displeased by the words, and he said, a trifle curtly:

"I never go into any dishonest business."

"I do not wish to imply that, but—"

"What? Speak out."

"Well, I will. Frankly, I have never held a very high opinion of private detectives."

A queer look passed over Dan's face, and he wheeled his chair so he could look Norcross fairly in the eyes without turning his head in the least.

"Is—that—so?"

The words were spoken very deliberately, and Paul did not know but he had deeply offended the man who had befriended him, but he was not going to "take water" then.

"It is true," he declared; "although I may not have been right."

There was a queer twinkle in Downing's eyes.

"You do not hesitate about telling me this."

"Why should I? I believe in being frank as far as possible."

"That is a good rule to live by when you can avoid offensiveness by your frankness."

"I trust I have not been offensive?"

"Not in the least; quite the contrary."

With this, Double-voice Dan resumed the examination of his papers and letters. After about ten minutes, he again turned to Paul.

"I do not mean to ever be offended at the truth," he said. "But there was no reason why your remark should touch me at all. I do not class myself with the common herd of so-called 'private detectives.' I have been on the regular force, and I could be there to-day, if I wished. I had reasons for leaving the force, the chief one being the killing work for small pay. If I do say so, I was always counted as one of the best men on the force, and I was given the most difficult cases. But my promotion was not at all in accord with the hard work I did and the success that attended my efforts. It is very slow climbing. In this world we all work for boodle, my boy, and the average detective is not able to get a very large supply by fair means so long as he remains in the business. I began to believe I could do better on my own hook than I could as a regular, so I resolved to go it alone."

"You resigned and became a private detective?"

"I resigned; I went into business on my own hook. The name of 'private detective' is distasteful to me, because I so well know the rascals who are in the business. Right here in New York some of the most crafty criminals in the country fatten and thrive under the name of private detectives. I know them for what they are, and when I get the opportunity, I am going to bring some of them up with a round turn. They are rascals, blackguards and blackmailers! They feast on the weakness of humanity! They are only fit to track down wayward husbands or weak and erring wives! Sir, I have a rule never to undertake cases of that kind. They are distasteful to me. I have enough of a different nature to attend to—more than I can possibly look after. If I had them at my command, I could find work for a dozen men, but I am not running a private detective 'agency.' The men who are willing to go into the business and who are capable of making a success I find I cannot trust. They would betray me. If I had a number of them around me, it would not be long before I would have as bad a reputation as these other places. Instead of doing that way, I prefer to take such cases as I can handle alone and send the others to the police. No, no, I eschew the name of private detective!"

"But what do you call yourself?"

"Didn't you hear me say I decided to go it alone? I call myself the Go-it-Alone Detective. Others may call me a private detective, but I do not accept the title."

Then Dan smiled in a pleasant manner that lighted up his usually stern face.

"Well, I do not blame you for choosing such a title," confessed Paul. "You are certainly independent of all others and fully able to go it alone."

"Still an assistant would be of great aid to me. In fact, I need one, but, so far, have been unable to find one to suit me."

After some moments of silence, Dan suddenly asked:

"Norcross, how would you like to become a detective?"

"That is a hard question to answer. I have never fancied I should like the life, but I may not be right."

"I think you would succeed."

"Do you?"

"I certainly do. Of course, you know very

little about the business now and would have to study it in all its details. I have a proposition to make to you."

"I am listening."

"First, I wish you to understand you are at perfect liberty to do as you please. I place no claim upon you. You have promised to make good whatever I have expended on your account, and no man could ask more. What I shall offer will be, as I now believe, for your benefit and mine, should you accept. I think you have the necessary qualifications for a detective, and I need an assistant. I have faith that you are thoroughly trustworthy and honorable, and I offer you a chance to try your hand at the work. I will do what I can to give you an insight into it and help you along."

With this, the detective leaned back in his chair and awaited Paul's decision.

Norcross arose to his feet.

"Sir," he said, somewhat huskily, "I appreciate your generosity, and—"

"It is not generosity," Dan put in, sharply; "it is business."

"Do you really make the offer from that standpoint?"

"I make it from no other. Do not be hasty about deciding. Think it over, if you wish. I will give you time. If it seems distasteful to you, do not enter into it at all, for no man can make a success of a business he does not like. A man's heart must be in his work in order for him to do his level best, and a detective who is not always doing his best has no use on earth."

"If I enter into this—"

"If you enter into this arrangement, you will be at liberty to withdraw any time you see fit. As for your remuneration—"

"It is not necessary to speak of that. I trust I understand the opening you have given me, and I should not overestimate my value, you may be sure."

"My boy, I think you will be inclined to underestimate it. You are almost too modest, or you are an excellent dissembler. I think we shall not disagree about financial matters."

"I am sure not. Mr. Downing, I accept your offer, and I will do my best."

"That is all any living man could do," said Dan, as he arose and took Paul's hand.

CHAPTER XVI.

A WARNING.

"Now," said Norcross, as they resumed their seats, "tell me what you wish me to do first."

"I want you to aid me in this Morton case, and I think you can be of great service in clearing up the mystery of the lost heir. I have told you I do not believe the story told by the gamin known as De Weasle?"

"Yes."

"I think the boy was hired to tell the lie that came from his lips—I have always thought so. At the time of the disappearance of Harry Morton, I was engaged on work that kept me busy, but I took an interest in the case and kept track of the newspaper stories concerning it. Of course I did not get at the inside facts in that manner, but even then I formed the opinion that the street gamin told a lie concerning the boy who fell into the sewer. If Harry Morton fell into the sewer, his body was not recovered. Two other boys were reported missing at about that time, but both were afterward found, and both said they had not been in the sewer. If Harry Morton did not fall into the sewer, De Weasle was hired to tell the story that came from his lips. De Weasle suddenly disappeared, and no track of him could be found. Now, he is back again, and he needs to be watched. At the same time, Marlton Edgewood should also be watched. I cannot pipe both of them—"

"You do need an assistant."

"That is plain enough to you. But I know of none I could secure who were trustworthy. I need more than one, but one will be of great aid."

"Command me."

"I wish to hunt up the gamin: at the same time, I wish Edgewood watched. I believe he knows something about the lost boy."

"You wish me to watch him?"

"For a little."

"All right. I will do my best."

The detective fumbled in his desk a moment, then he looked up, as if a sudden thought had struck him.

"Where did you go after the fire last night?"

Paul told of the meeting with Limpy Tim, after getting clear of the mob, and of accompanying the boy to the stage entrance of the cheap theater.

"I made myself look as decent as possible in the rig I wore," he explained, "then I walked along home with Tim and the girl he calls Mamie. She is really beautiful, and it is a shame she has to sing in that place. She was glad enough to have a friend of Tim's along to protect her in case she should be molested. She walked ahead and we followed. When we reached her home, she insisted on my coming in. I finally did so, and spent a pleasant half-hour in her snug but tidy home. Mrs. Winter is a pleasant-faced woman, who little dreams the dangers her child is exposed to every night

of her life. If she did, Mamie would not have the chance to sing for six dollars a week."

Paul did not protract his story, for he saw the detective had already lost interest in it.

"I would have given something to know just where Edgewood went last night. I suppose I might have discovered, had I not taken a fancy to try the ventriloquist trick on them in the dive last night. It was a good chance to play a joke of that sort, and I could not resist the temptation. But for Banton, I do not think exposure would have followed. I long for a case against that young rascal, and, if I get one, I will give him his lodging and keeps for the good of the city."

Norcross did not speak, but Dan arose to his feet and led the way to a back room, saying:

"Follow me."

Once within the little room, Paul saw the walls were hung with garments of all sorts. From the assortment a man could dress himself in a hundred odd and fantastic suits.

Detective Dan pulled out some drawers that were filled with wigs and beards. Then he opened another little drawer that contained grease-paint and brushes for laying them on.

"Norcross," said the Double-voice Detective, "I am going to let you select a disguise from among these. You are to use your own judgment as to disguise and make-up. The only thing I will say is be, as sparing as possible of paint and never use wig or beard when you can avoid it. The most artfully constructed beard will often betray the wearer. They cannot stand a close scrutiny in the full light of day, that is sure."

With only a word or two more, the detective left his chosen assistant alone in the little room. He returned to the front office and to his papers.

Half an hour passed, and then there was a light step behind Double-voice Dan.

"Melican man detective want jobee?" inquired a smooth voice. "Ling See gotee velly stiff jobee flo him. Ling See dlo washee-washee dlo on Mlott street. Melican blokes stealee shirtee. Ling See want dlective shalpee clatch blokee, git shirtee."

Dan surveyed the figure from head to feet. In appearance it was a genuine Chinaman, the paint having been used in such a skillful manner that the eyes had the appearance of being a Celestial.

"That is very good, Norcross," nodded Dan. "I see you have the knack of making-up, and you have an excellent dialect. The only thing that bothers me is the fact that you will have to appear on Madison avenue in that guise. It may attract some notice there, but it would be just the thing if you were to follow Edgewood into the slums."

Paul sat down, while Dan spent some moments in thought.

"I have it!" he finally exclaimed. "You must remain here until I telephone for you to come to a certain place. As a Chinaman, you will have little trouble in finding your way about, for you can inquire of any policeman. I see you take to this city as a duck takes to water, and you already have it down pretty fine."

"I think Edgewood will call on Horace Morton some time to-day, and I mean to be present when he calls. I will shadow him from the house to some saloon, where he will most certainly go, then I will telephone to you. You are to come there and take up the work of shadowing, while I will look for De Weasle."

"All right," nodded Paul. "I am ready for anything. But what if he leaves the saloon while I am on the road and before I arrive there?"

"I will leave instructions in some manner, you may depend on that."

"Very well."

Some minor things were discussed, and then Detective Dan left his office and sauntered along the street. He was in no particular hurry, for he did not wish to reach Morton's before the old man had arisen.

He took a car and arrived at Madison Square at a quarter past ten, by the Tower clock. At a quarter of eleven he was at Horace Morton's door.

On inquiring for Mr. Morton, Dan was told the old gentleman wished to see him very much. Then he was shown into the library, where the old broker reclined in his easy-chair, looking very pale and wan.

He started up as Dan entered.

"Good-morning, Mr. Morton."

"Ah! is that you, Downing?" and Dan perceived the man's voice was unsteady. "I am glad you have come, sir—glad you have come. I have been wanting to see you."

"Do not rise, Mr. Morton."

"Rise! I can't keep still. I must rise. I am worn out with sitting. I have been up since seven, sir, and my usual hour of rising now is ten."

"You seem to be troubled about something?"

"I am troubled, sir—I am."

"What is the cause?"

"My Walter—my nephew—"

"What of him?"

"That I cannot answer. For the first time

since he came to live with me he has been out all night. He has not yet appeared, and he left the house before twelve yesterday, sir."

"My dear sir, are you not unnecessarily alarming yourself about the young man?"

"I do not think so—no. He is not a wild youth—he is not a rowdy. He always keeps very good hours. He is seldom out after twelve. I usually hear him close the door of his room when he comes in. He did not come in last night. I listened—I heard the clocks strike three. Then I called John and asked him to see if Walter was in his room. He reported he was not. Sir, I did not sleep. I tried to, but I could not. What can have happened to the boy?"

The detective did not make the reply that arose to his lips. He crushed back the words, saying easily:

"Oh, nothing serious, I think, Mr. Morton. He is a wide-awake youth, and quite able to take care of himself. He will probably put in an appearance soon, and satisfactorily explain his absence."

"I trust so—I trust so. But I have my fears. If another blow should fall upon me, it would completely crush me. I could not endure it. Walter has been like a son to me."

"But have you anything to tell me, sir—anything of my little Harry?"

"Not yet; but I hope to have soon. I can assure you I am doing my best, and I think I am on the right trail."

The old man leaned on the back of the chair, eagerness expressed on his pale face.

"You—you think he is still alive?"

"I hope so, but I can give you no assurance of the fact. I do not believe he perished in the sewer."

"I have never believed that," stoutly asserted Horace Morton. "If he is dead, he has been killed by the wretches who stole him from me, though what their object could be I cannot say. I have offered to pay any sum and ask no questions if they would restore him to me."

"You offered that, but at the same time the case was in the hands of the regulars. That made it bad. If he was kidnapped, the kidnappers probably stood in fear of the officers, for all of your promises. Now the matter is in my hands, it is quite a different affair. I should not be at all surprised if the kidnappers made offers to negotiate. If they do, you are to inform me at once."

"I have warned you against trusting too much to Marlton Edgewood—"

"I think you misjudge Mr. Edgewood, sir."

Dan made a swift gesture.

"Are you aware Edgewood was a suitor for the hand of your wife before you married her? The question staggered Morton.

"No, sir—no!"

"Such is the fact."

"You are sure? There must be some mistake about—"

"There is none. He was one of her suitors."

"Why—why has he never told me that? I can understand why Thora should not tell me, but it is different with Marlton."

"You have trusted this man?"

"Yes."

"I think you have trusted him too much. Listen to me, Horace Morton, Edgewood is a snake in the grass. When you take him into your household, you are warming a viper who will sting you. He is playing a game for big stakes, I am sure of that."

"Why have you not told me this before?"

"Because I have never been positive I was right. Recently, fortune has thrown in my path a man who has given me an insight into this Edgewood's past. This has caused me to give you this warning. Still, I wish you to so treat Edgewood that he will not know you suspect him. I wish you to use him—for a time—as you have used him in the past. This being the case, you may wonder why I have warned you at all."

"I do."

"Well, I will tell you. It is because I believe your life is in danger!"

CHAPTER XVII.

A CONFESSION OF HATRED.

HORACE MORTON was amazed. He started back, one hand uplifted and trembling.

"My life in danger?" he repeated. "What can you mean?"

"Exactly what I said," came firmly from the detective's lips.

"But, you do not think— What do you think?"

"Marlton Edgewood has brought you well under his influence. He has a smooth tongue and magnetic manner. He has succeeded in making you believe he is your firmest friend. The man is plotting for your wealth!"

"No, no!"

"I have not a doubt concerning it."

"It is impossible!"

"It is the truth. He has worked his cards well, and he thinks he sees success almost within his grasp."

"But what can his plot be?"

"I am not ready to answer that question just now, but I wish to warn you against putting

your name to any paper he may wish you to sign, no matter what its contents may be. If you do such a thing, you will sign your own death-warrant!"

Morton sunk helplessly into the chair. Dan instantly saw he had been speaking unguardedly with too much abruptness. The old man was utterly unprepared for what he had heard, and therefore he was sorely shaken.

"I trust you will not let this overcome you," the detective hastened to say. "You are warned in time, and there is no reason why this villain should get the best of you. Meantime, I am tightening the coils around him, and I will have him landed high and dry before he is aware of it."

"You do not think it possible he had anything to do with the kidnapping of my Harry?"

"As to that, I cannot say. It is not impossible, for that would remove a stumbling-block in his path to secure your wealth. I shall have the man constantly shadowed. When he betrays himself, he will soon find he is landed high and dry. I think the time is not far away."

"I trust not—I trust not. It will be no easy task to treat this man the same as of old."

"But you will do so?"

"I will do my best."

"That will be well enough, I am sure. Meanwhile, if your nephew does not put in an appearance, it will be well to have the police look him up."

"You—you—"

"I cannot attend to that, Mr. Morton. Already I have my hands full."

"Now, I wish to see your wife."

"My wife? What can you wish to see her for?"

Detective Dan smiled.

"I have an excellent reason, I assure you, sir. You shall know all later. For the present, I think I have told you quite enough."

With considerable of an effort, the old broker arose to his feet and stood before Downing.

"I think I have told you, sir," he said, sully, "that I do not trust my wife with all my secrets."

"You have."

"I regret to say we are not at all in harmony. It is a humiliating confession to make, but I find it necessary in this case."

"And I have told you you need have no fear of others ever learning anything of your private affairs from my lips."

"It is evident you are a gentleman, sir. I am glad to have found one man I can trust."

The detective bowed his thanks, and, directly, he left the old man with his thoughts.

Coming upon the chambermaid, he requested her to tell Mrs. Morton a gentleman wished to speak with her in the parlor.

"Will you send up a card?" asked the girl.

"No, I choose not to do so."

"What if she asks for your card?"

"Tell her I gave none."

"Then she may refuse to see you."

"In which case, say I called myself an old friend who had most important business with her."

The girl bowed and ran lightly up the stairs, while Dan retired to the parlor.

The girl came down in a short time and said madam would see the gentleman very soon.

Being left alone, the detective set about amusing himself by looking out of the window.

Suddenly he started and uttered an exclamation.

Marlton Edgewood was approaching the house.

Detective Dan drew back and watched the bold plotter till he rung at the door.

"Ten to one he will come in here!" thought the man in the parlor. "I do not wish him to see me. What shall I do?"

He glanced around. Some *portieres* which concealed an alcove attracted his attention, and in a moment he was concealed behind them.

He was scarcely too soon.

Edgewood came into the parlor, drawing off his gloves and scowling, as he muttered:

"Confound the impudence of that butler! He knows I want to see Thora at once, but he will not hurry, and he looks me over as if I were a curiosity. By Jove! I scarcely fancy a better dressed man enters this house."

Even as he was mumbling, Mrs. Morton entered softly.

She was dressed in a morning gown and looked charming.

"You wish to see me, sir?"

Edgewood whirled.

"Thora!"

"Mr. Edgewood!"

"Oh, come, now!" he exclaimed, advancing toward her. "That is a bit cold—from you."

There was a world of insinuation in those two final words, and a bit more color mounted to the woman's cheeks.

"Great Scott!" thought the concealed detective. "He is going to make love to her!"

"You have business with me?" questioned Mrs. Morton, half turning away.

"I believe she thinks it was he, who sent for her!" flashed through Double-voice Dan's head.

"Business? Well, you might put it so. Any way, I wanted to see you."

"I am here."

"Thora, you—"

"Stop, Marlton Edgewood! What right have you to address me thus?"

He looked surprised at her words and her almost tragic pose, and then something like a smile flitted across his face. He drew up his portly figure, bowing.

"Am I to forget the past?" he questioned.

"The past is dead!"

"Ah! say you so? You are not right—the past lives. You have not succeeded in drowning the memory of the past, even though you may try to deceive yourself into the belief that you have. We were schoolmates together—I loved you—"

"Stop!" she commanded once more. "That was many years ago, and—"

"And I have never ceased to love you in all these years!" swiftly cut in the man, his dark face becoming flushed. "Not even though you sold your beautiful self to that old fool for his gold! You did not love him then, and I knew it! You do not love him now—you hate him, and I know it! He is nothing to you!"

"He is my husband!"

"Your husband—pah! The word is a mockery! You know he is nothing to you in truth, even though the iron band of the law may hold you together! Your husband—that old fool!"

"In the sight of the world he is!"

"But in your heart he is worse than a stranger."

"Worse?"

"Yes, for you hate him!"

She fell back, clutching at a chair, her face becoming deathly pale, one hand being pressed to her breast. She seemed on the verge of sinking down helplessly.

The detective was so interested that he cautiously parted the *portieres* to watch the scene.

"Hate him!" gasped the emotion-shaken woman. "It is true! He is most repugnant to me. I do hate him!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

A PASSION-SWAYED WOMAN.

THERE was no reason to doubt her statement, for hatred was written on her face, as well as expressed by her words. Still she was a beautiful woman. The watching detective thought he had never seen her look so handsome as at that moment.

Marlton Edgewood stood as if rendered breathless by her unconscious pose and the suppressed fire of her words. The look of passionate admiration had grown on his sensual face till it was like a danger-signal.

Had the woman looked into Edgewood's face at that moment, she might have seen something there that would have made her blood run cold.

The scheming rascal evidently feared his face would betray him, for he turned half-away. That was enough for the hidden detective to see that look, and Double-voice Dan longed to fasten his iron clutch on the wretch.

Still Dan did not understand the situation, and he was eager to hear what was to follow. Once more he had cautiously closed the heavy curtains, only allowing himself a tiny place to peer forth. He listened, ready to hold his breath that he might not miss a whisper.

With a visible effort, the woman threw off the weakness that had seized upon her.

"Why did I say that?" she hoarsely moaned.

"I—I did—"

Edgewood was at her side in an instant. He caught her hand, his lips close to her pale cheek as he swiftly said:

"It is too late to take it back now, Thora! You meant it. I have known it for a long time. You cast me off and sold yourself to this old man for his gold, but he was unable to purchase your heart."

She flung herself from him.

"Cast you off!" she repeated. "Are you not presuming too much, Marlton Edgewood? Were you ever an accepted suitor? I confess you showed me attentions, and I—"

"You were pleased by them. You cannot deny that! You gave me reason to hope my suit was not vain."

"Then I did so unconsciously."

"You may say that now, but, if you really think so, you have forgotten. You smiled on me—you listened to my passionate words—you did not repulse me! I loved you as I can never love any other creature."

"And I— There was another!"

"Another?"

"Yes, another for whom I cared—the only one I really and truly loved! My heart was his—"

"Paul Norcross!"

Edgewood hissed the name, his face again growing dark with anger.

She bowed.

"Yes," came slowly from her lips; "I did love Paul in those old days. Even now, I sometimes dream of him."

The portly rascal leaned on the back of a chair.

"And you are the wife of another!" he sneered.

Those words aroused her—they seemed to touch her as with fire. The blood flamed

into her face and a light gleamed in her eyes. She came close to him and looked him straight in the face.

"His wife—no! Even you do not know the bitter, black truth! You spoke the truth when you said to me he is worse than a stranger! I am nothing to him now—never shall be again! He is an old man—he totters on the verge of the grave! I should have pity and compassion on him—it would seem womanly. I have none! Even though it may seem that my heart has turned to stone—even though I may seem like a woman degraded and lost—even though I may seem vile and fiendish—I have no pity for that white-haired old man! And, as much as I hate him, I hate and loathe myself a thousand times worse! 'Tis true I sold myself for gold, but a wretched bargain I made! I sought the heights of heaven; I have seen the depths of hell!"

No actress on the mimic stage ever displayed such powerful passion, for in this case there was nothing simulated—all was real. Every word seemed wrung from a soul aflame.

More than ever before was Marlton Edgewood astounded and rendered speechless. He began to see he had not fathomed the depths of this woman's soul. He remembered he had fancied her shallow—that she had sold herself for money. Now, for one brief instant, he caught a glimpse of the fiery vortex of her nature—he looked into the abyss of her soul, where the flood of passion surged and seethed over the black and jagged rocks of remembrance and remorse.

The watching detective was hardly less moved by the singular scene he was witnessing. He was thrilled and held speechless. He forgot himself and his surroundings. He saw nothing, thought of nothing, but the passion-swayed woman whose scorching words he had just heard.

For some seconds Thora stood there, her bosom rising and falling like a tempest-tossed lake. Of a sudden her color fled once more. She half-turned away, stretching out her hands and groping blindly, as if she could not see.

Edgewood took a step forward, as if to assist her, but a single glance from her eyes kept his hands from touching her body. She sunk into a chair, and he stood beside her.

Then there was silence in the room.

Outside, a carriage rolled past on the asphalt.

Behind the *portieres* the man heard his heart suddenly begin to pound like a trip-hammer in his breast. He breathed again, but it seemed as if he must betray himself by the act. Had the scene continued, it seemed that the reaction from the suspense must surely have caused him to unwillingly reveal his presence.

Marlton Edgewood turned and walked a short distance from the woman whose words still rung in his ears. The soft carpet gave no sound beneath his feet.

When he turned back, he saw the woman had changed her position somewhat, but she had not arisen from the chair. He went to her, saying softly:

"Thora."

She stirred—she lifted her face—he recoiled. All the color, all the passion, all the life had died out of it. She looked not a bit like the woman of a few moments ago.

She saw him fall back, and a laugh came from her colorless lips.

Such a laugh! There was no merriment in the sound, and there was no merriment written on her drawn face. She seemed to have aged ten years in as many seconds.

"Perhaps you will change your mind, Marlton Edgewood," she said. "You will not care to pour your tales of love into my ears when you know the truth."

"I do not understand you, Thora."

"I did not expect you would."

"Your words—your manner—"

"I have been saying foolish things—I have been acting like a woman who has lost her reason. Well, it is scarcely a wonder that I have done so. Have I not endured enough?—But who besides yourself has heard my words?"

She went quickly to the door and looked out into the hall. A breath of relief escaped her lips, as she turned back.

"No one there," she said. "You alone heard what I said."

She did not dream of the man behind the heavy curtains.

Something like a grim smile passed over Marlton Edgewood's dark face.

"And I, Thora, I heard enough to give me a full understanding of your position. I scarcely wonder you hate the old man, for you are no more mates than December and June."

"It is not that."

"Not that?"

"No, it is not that."

"Then what can it be?"

She spoke slowly and in a guarded tone, for she had now recovered her self-control.

"You know too much already, Marlton Edgewood. A bit ago I was foolish enough to say things my lips should not have uttered. I spoke in an abandon of passion, and already I regret my folly."

A look of triumph showed in the man's eyes.

"Why should you regret anything? Have I not shown myself your friend?"

"To a certain extent, yes."

"To a certain extent! Well, that is good! I fancy it is to an unlimited extent. Thora, you scarcely understand how deeply you are indebted to me."

"To you?"

"Yes."

"And you are here to tell me it?"

"I have kept silent as long as possible; I must speak now. You cannot refuse to listen."

"I thought you claimed to be a gentleman?"

He bowed.

"You thought correctly."

"No gentleman ever forces a woman to listen to what she does not wish to hear."

He scowled a bit, then said:

"I will not force you, Thora; but I ask you to listen—for your own sake."

"Why for my sake?"

"That you will discover. I know you do not comprehend to what an extent I have been your friend. Do you remember the *curtainless window*?"

A gasp came from her lips.

"The curtainless window?"

He bowed.

"I see you remember."

"What do you know of that?" she exclaimed, as she darted to his side and clutched his arm.

"Speak, man! Tell me what you know!"

"Now, do not become excited, Thora," he cautioned, attempting to soothe her with a caress.

"Be careful!" she hoarsely commanded, as she thrust his hand aside. "Tell me what you know!"

"I know of the curtainless window—of the storm—of the lightning's flash! The night was dark, but that flash showed you a face at the window—a man was peering into the room! Now, you understand how much I know."

A bitter cry broke from her lips.

"Great God! You know my secret!"

Then she reeled backward, her hands pressed to her head, and sunk swooning into a chair.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE RASCAL SHOWS HIS HAND.

A SAVAGE curse broke from Edgewood's lips, as he leaped to the woman's side and bent over her.

"Fool that I was!" he hissed. "I ought to have known it would break her all up! That squeal has probably aroused the entire house!" Then he hastened to the door.

He was just in time to meet a girl who was hurrying to the parlor.

"What has happened?" was the question with which he was greeted.

"Nothing of any consequence," he replied. "Mrs. Morton fancied she saw a mouse, and that alarmed her so she screamed. She is all right now."

"Oh, is that all?" laughed the girl. "Now, I am not afraid of a mouse. It takes a rat to scare me."

Edgewood laughed a bit, then requested her to inform any one who questioned her that there was nothing serious the matter. As the girl turned away, he went back to the woman, who still lay limp and helpless in the chair—lay like some beautiful thing that is crushed and broken.

"Thora!" he said, softly, bending over her.

She did not stir—she did not seem to breathe.

"Such infernal luck!" he guardedly snarled. "Now, I do not know what to do! If I had some water here—or if I had something strong and bracing for her to inhale. As it is, I must depend upon her to come round of her own accord."

Once more he bent over her, speaking her name.

Something like a shudder passed over that shapely form.

"Thora!"

His lips were close to her cheek and he had clasped her hand.

Again she shuddered—she breathed—her lips moved.

"Don't touch me!"

He heard her whisper the words, and he recoiled as if she had struck him with one dainty hand.

There was a black cloud on the villain's face and his hands were clinched. Her eyes slowly unclosed, and there was a look of dread and horror in the gaze she turned upon him.

What of the man behind the *portieres*?

Double-voice Dan was absorbed in all that occurred. He had become an eavesdropper through trying to conceal himself from Edgewood, whom he wished to shadow after leaving the house; but he believed the words he was thus overhearing would be of importance to him in working out the mystery of the missing heir. Just why he thought so he could not have explained.

Marlton Edgewood paced across the floor and then returned to the woman's side.

"Thora," he said, "there is no reason why you should be thus overcome."

She sat up a little straighter—whispering:

"No reason—my God!"

"None at all," he assured. "Have I not proved your friend? You should not doubt me now."

"You know my secret!"

"It is safe."

"Safe! No, no—it has never been safe for one instant! I wonder it has not broken me down. It would, but hope has buoyed me up. I have thought of the future—I have dreamed of the future when—"

"How much do you know? It was not your face at the window?"

"You are in no condition to speak further of this at present."

"I am—I must! You shall tell me the truth! What is it you are working for? Is it money? All I have shall be yours, if you will keep my secret!"

She had started to her feet, her hands outstretched. He grasped them both. She made a feeble effort to draw them away, but he clung to them, his dark face once more getting the hot flush of a sensuous passion.

"It is not money!" he swiftly declared. "It is yourself—your own queenly self, Thora! Years ago I lost you, but the time is near when I may have a chance to claim you again. Then—then—"

He tried to clasp her in his arms, but she broke from him.

"Restrain yourself, Marlton!" she entreated. "Remember there is a man who still has the right to call me his wife!"

"But you give me reason to hope?"

"Then I did so unintentionally."

He fell back a step, but a moment later he sprang forward.

"What do you mean by that?" he almost savagely demanded. "Do you intend to defy me? Remember, Thora—remember the little hut in the Jersey wood!"

She caught at the back of a chair.

"I have asked you to tell me what you know."

"And I have told you enough for the present. I do not wish to speak of that now. I only wish to let you know how truly your friend I am."

"And how completely I am in your power!"

"I did not think of that."

"Say not so. It is plainly the principal thing in your thoughts. Great Heaven! what a coil there is about me! What can I do?"

"I can release you. Trust in me."

"What do you mean?"

"The old man who calls you his wife is tottering on the verge of the grave. He cannot live very long, at the most. A few days will make little difference to him, and he is better out of the world than in it."

With a little cry of horror, she lifted one hand and fell back, shudderingly.

"No, no, no!" she gasped. "You cannot mean that! You—you would not—"

She could not speak the dreadful words; they choked her. She clutched her throat and gasped, her eyes still fixed upon him in that horrified stare.

"Have you never thought of that?" he asked. She could not reply.

"If he was a young man it would be a different thing," said Edgewood, cautiously. "But he is old and feeble. His usefulness is past. He almost seems to be living out of spite more than anything else. If he were dead, then you would be free to love and marry me."

"Do you think I could love you if I knew you had his blood on your hands? Man, you are mad!"

"Then it is my love for you that has driven me so!"

The hands of man behind the curtain were clinched. How Dan thirsted to get at the throat of the dastardly villain! He saw through Edgewood's daring scheme now. The man was plotting to put Horace Morton out of the way and then marry the beautiful widow. If Harry Morton never turned up, it was very probable all Morton's property would go to his wife. Edgewood was scheming to obtain his lost love and the old broker's wealth at one stroke.

But Double-voice Dan now held the cards that would foil the unscrupulous wretch.

The detective knew not just what to think of Thora. He could not comprehend the woman. At times he loathed her, and then he would feel that she was a woman wronged and driven to desperation. Pity would take the place of loathing.

But what was her secret? Dan would have given much to have the question answered. He hoped the two would in some manner betray the secret. It was plain Edgewood had an iron grip on the unfortunate wife, and the detective knew the daring rascal would not hesitate about using all the advantage he had secured.

"He will find himself entrapped when he least expects such a thing," thought the watcher. "What I have heard this day has given me all I need to work on. He is my game! Even if I do not find the lost heir, I am going to save Horace Morton from being murdered."

Thora suddenly began to pace the floor. She seemed like a caged tigress.

Marlton Edgewood crouched on the back of a chair and watched her. There was an expression of triumph on his face and in his eyes.

Suddenly she paused before him, extending her hands pleadingly.

"Marlton, have you no mercy?" she added.

"Mercy—yes. It will be a merciful act to release you from the chains that gull you."

"No! If God sees fit to release me, I shall be thankful; but the hand of man must not do it."

"I was foolish to speak to you of it; I ought to have carried out the work and let you remain ignorant. It is too late to turn back now—"

"You shall not do it!"

"Why?"

"I will go to him—I will warn him!"

He caught her wrist.

"Fool! you would ruin everything!"

"I care not!"

"You dare not do this!"

"You are mistaken, as you shall see."

"If you think of such a thing, I will betray your secret. He shall know the truth—he shall know how you have deceived him! What think you will be the result? You will go behind prison bars, for he will have no mercy!"

She sunk on her knees, a bitter moan coming from her lips.

"Father in Heaven! is there no escape?" she sobbed. "Oh, man, man! you cannot mean this? As you have said, he is old—he cannot live long. Wait, wait, wait! When he is dead—when he dies a natural death—"

He bent over her, grasping her hands.

"What then?" he hoarsely demanded.

"Give me time!" she panted. "Let me think!"

What then—what then? Will you swear to marry me—will you promise to become my wife, Thora?"

"Give me time?" she still pleaded.

"You must answer now!"

"Oh, I cannot promise!"

"Not even to save his worthless old life—not even to save your secret?"

He saw the life going from her face. There was a mingled light of pleading and loathing in her great eyes. She tried to speak, and then her strength deserted her.

A moment later she lay on the carpet at his feet!

She had not fainted, but her nerves and her strength had failed her. She lay there sobbing like a thing broken-hearted.

Wretch, dastard, villain that he was, the sound of that pitiful sobbing touched him. He dropped on his knees at her side.

"Thora, forgive me! I was harsh—I was thoughtless! I should have given you time. For heaven's sake, be quiet! That sound tears my heart! I thought my heart was hardened to endure anything, but I cannot see you thus! Look up—speak to me!"

She could not look up—she could not speak. Still she sobbed, but the sound grew fainter and fainter. He continued to pour his passionate words into her ears.

Dan Downing was naturally a chivalrous soul, and what he had witnessed so enraged him that he was obliged to do his best to keep himself in check. He longed to leap out and give the dark-faced scoundrel the drubbing he so richly merited.

After a time, Edgewood lifted the helpless woman and placed her in a soft chair. He was still talking passionately when she recovered enough to speak.

"Please leave me!" she entreated. "I asked you to give me time. If you are not absolutely heartless and cruel, you will do so. I have endured enough to-day; I can not endure more! Give me time!"

"May I come to-morrow?"

"Yes, yes, if you will go at once!"

He bowed, kissed her hand, and gracefully retired from the room. A few moments later, the hidden detective heard the outer door close.

Dan choked back something like a curse of dismay.

His game was slipping from him. He could not escape from behind the curtains and get out of the room without betraying himself. What was to be done?

Suddenly, the woman leaped to her feet and stood in the center of the room.

"How I hate that man!" came chokingly from her throat. "Now I hate him more than ever before! He is my evil genius! He has me in the toils—I am in a snare! Oh, my God! to think he should know my secret! What shall I do—what can I do?"

Suddenly, from out in the hall, a voice seemed to call:

"Mrs. Morton!"

The woman waited till the call was repeated a second time, and then she answered it.

The moment she left the room, the detective slipped from behind the curtains and hastened to the door. Peering into the hall, he watched her till she disappeared, and then he hastened out.

By a trick of ventriloquism he had lured her from the room.

He was soon bounding down the steps, looking up and down the street in search for his game.

Edgewood had disappeared.

CHAPTER XX.

AN INSOLENT VISITOR.

BARELY had Dan Downing disappeared when a man ascended the steps of the Morton mansion and rang the bell.

It was Ben Sukes.

"I have very important business with Mr. Morton," he declared, when the door was opened.

"What is the nature of your business?" asked the servant.

"Now, looker here, my man," said Sukes, importantly, "don't go for ter ask too menny questions. Business is business, an' I'm in a rush."

"Mr. Morton is not seeing strangers."

"You bet your wealth he'll see me, mister."

"Well, not to-day," dryly asserted the man, and he attempted to close the door.

Quick as thought, Sukes inserted his body in the opening, placed his shoulder against the door and hurled it opened, tumbling the butler to the floor.

"Well, to-day's good enough for me," observed the rough, as he slouched into the hall. "Pick yerself up, sonny, and trot off ter Mr. Morton. Tell him the high-cock-a-loreem of the Buxery is here and wants a word with him."

The overturned servant scrambled to his feet, furious with the indignity that had been heaped upon him. "I'll have you arrested, sir!" he spluttered. "This is an outrage, an'—"

"Oh, come off!" calmly advised Sukes. "Take a reef in yer jaw and slide afore I punch yer eye out. Take a look at me, I'm a case, I be! Now, slide and tell old Money-bags I'm around."

"And leave you here to steal the house! No, sir!"

"Steal—me steal! Well, I guess I will have to learn you common decency! Stan' up here and let me break your nose!"

But the butler backed off in the greatest terror, calling loudly for help.

Several of the servants appeared, and the butler asked their assistance in ejecting the intruder.

Sukes saw there was trouble in the air, and he prepared for battle.

"Come on, ther whole bloody gang of ye!" he cried. "I can lick the crowd!"

They were inclined to think he could, and they hesitated about attacking him.

Just then Horace Morton appeared, coming out of the library. He was leaning on a cane.

"What is all this hubbub about?" he demanded.

"There, that's the man I want ter see!" exclaimed Sukes.

"Me? Am I the man?"

"Yes; an' this crowd is tryin' ter keep me frum seein' of ye."

"What business have you with me?"

"Mighty important business."

"What is its nature?"

"Private."

"I think you you have made a mistake. I never have business transactions with men of your class."

"Well, if ye never have before, ye will now, an' I'm bettin' my boodle on that."

"You are mistaken, sir," said the old man, sternly. "Instead of that, I shall hand you over to the police. It is evident you have some criminal scheme on hand, but you will not be able to carry it out in this house."

"Hand me over ter ther perlice, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"Looker here, old chap, I'll bet you odds you don't."

Mr. Morton asked one of the servants to call an officer. As the man was turning away, Sukes said:

"All right; have the police and I will keep mum. But, if you want to know what has become of your bloomin' nevy, just you chain up and go slow."

"My nephew—my Walter!" excitedly exclaimed the old man.

"Just him," nodded Sukes.

"You know—"

"Well, you may find out what I know when you have called back that mug."

Immediately Horace Morton ordered the servant sent after the officer, recalled.

"Now, what have you to tell me?" he earnestly inquired.

"Well, you 'member I said my business was private, I s'pose."

"Yes, yes!"

"This hain't no place ter talk private business."

"That is true," acknowledged the old broker.

"Come into the library."

"All right; lead on."

Giving the disgusted servants a wink and a grin, Sukes followed the master of the house into the library. He took great pains to see that the door was securely closed, and then he surveyed the room in a manner that was simply insolent.

"You have something to say about my nephew sir?"

The old broker spoke a trifle sharply, for he did not like the manner of the man, to say the least.

Sukes thrust his hands into his pockets and walked around the room whistling softly and looking things over. Apparently, he had not heard Morton's words at all.

The old man stood with his hands on the back of a chair. As he followed with his eyes the

movements of the visitor, a look of anger grew on his face.

Just as Morton was about to speak, Sukes observed:

"Well, this is a right snug sort of a place. When I make a pull on ther street, I'm goin' ter put up a shanty of this kind."

"Sir!"

The visitor turned slowly and looked the man over.

"Now," he added, with a sneer, "who'd think to look at you that you'd ever bin able to git so much together without stealin'? You don't look as if you'd ever 'mounted to much."

The broker was aghast. He could scarcely believe the evidence of his ears.

"You insulting scoundrell!" he finally managed to gurgled. "What do you mean?"

Sukes put out one hand deprecatingly.

"Come, come, uncle!" he said. "What's ther use of gittin' riled? Take it easy, old boy."

"If I were a younger man—"

"But you're not, so don't get excited. You are old enough ter swaller solid facts 'thout chokin'."

"You pretended to come here on business."

"An' so I did. Now, how much do you really callate you're worth. I mean your entire boodle, clean down ter your last dollar?"

"That is none of your business, sir!" cried the old gentleman, trembling with rage. "I see you lied when you said you knew something of my nephew! I will have you kicked out of the house at once!"

He started to move toward the door, but with two strides Sukes blocked the way.

"You won't do anything of ther kind, uncle! If you do, it will go hard with Mr. Walter St. Cyril."

Morton raised his cane as if to strike the insulting tough, but the bullying rascal instantly snatched it from the old man's grasp.

CHAPTER XXI.

SUKES PLAYS FOR A STAKE.

"Now, go slow, old man!" advised the insolent visitor, tossing the cane across the room. "I am not to be fooled with, an' you'll find that out mighty soon. I'm here on business, an' I'll not go away till my business is attended ter."

The old broker fairly choked with rage and indignation. He attempted to speak, but so great was his fury that he only uttered a gurgling snarl. For a moment it seemed as if he would have an apoplectic fit, for his face fairly turned purple, and he swayed unsteadily.

Sukes looked on in di-may.

"Hanged ef he hain't goin' to slump!" muttered the man. "Blow such an old fool, anyhow!"

But Morton did not fall. He staggered into a chair, reaching out to touch a bell.

"None of that!" hissed the rough, as he snatched the hand away, and stood clutching the old broker's wrist. "You oughter know better by this time! I hain't here for foolin', and the quicker you git to talk business the better it'll be."

"You—you infernal scoundrell!" hoarsely exclaimed the old man. "If I were younger—"

"But ye hain't, uncle, so you may as well take it easy an' let it go at that. You're old enough to have good boss-sense, but I'm hanged if you're showin' it now! I hain't goin' to eat ye, man!"

"I will make you suffer for this, if—"

"That's it—there's an 'if' in the way, and it's bigger than a barn. You will come to your senses pretty soon, old cove, and see what a diddle-dashed old fool you are makin' of yourself. Now, don't get excited again! It's silly—actually childish! I talk plain, because I think it is the best thing for you. It will let you understand that I don't care a continental for you or your servants. I am not afraid of the whole household, and it is only for your own benefit I have prevented you from ringing up a gang of menials."

"You know you lie! Release my wrist, you dog!"

Sukes chuckled.

"Well, well, well! there's still some fire left in your blood. I thought there must be somethin' besides money about an old wreck like you fer ye ter catch a young an' beautiful wifel!"

"You insulting cur!"

"There, there! simmer down, old man! It is the best thing you can do."

"If Walter were only here—"

"Which he isn't, and couldn't git here if he tried."

"You know nothing of him."

"That's where you fool yourself."

"What do you know?"

"If you will promise to keep your fingers from that bell, I will let you go and we will talk over matters and things. But if you insist on ringing up ther lackeys ter git their heads punched—"

"Let me go."

"You won't ring?"

"Not now."

Sukes instantly released the broker's wrist, saying:

"If you don't ring now, ye won't at all. I

hain't goin' ter hurt ye, but you'll come ter your senses when we have talked a bit."

Horace Morton lay back in his chair, struggling with himself. He longed to ring up the servants and have the insolent visitor kicked from the place, but something more than his promise restrained him. It was not impossible but this man did know something of Walter.

"If you do not talk straight, it will be the worse for you, sir," declared the broker, a dangerous light in his aged eyes.

Sukes settled himself into a chair near at hand, carelessly waving one hand. He now seemed utterly at ease, but, in truth, his every nerve was strung to its highest tension and he was ready to leap at the master of the house should the man's hand again approach the bell.

"You will find my talk straight enough," he asserted; "but you may not like it fer a cent. I know a few things about you, Morton."

A hectic flush mounted to the broker's face, caused by the insulting familiarity of Sukes's words and manner.

"It's not what you know about me I want to hear," he said, holding himself in check. "If you know anything of my nephew speak out."

The visitor laughed.

"Oh, no; you don't care 'bout hearin' of yourself, but you may have to before I leave. I have been livin' on the rough side too blamed long for a man who knows as much as I do. What I know is worth money."

Morton said nothing, but kept his eyes on Sukes's face. He seemed to be fastening the features in his memory.

"You needn't bother 'bout that, for you'll be likely to see me often enough after this, unless you come down liberally the first plunk. I'm goin' to hit you fer dollars, and I'll hit ye so hard it'll most likely knock you off your pins."

"It is information concerning my Walter you want to sell. What do you know? Tell me that, and then I will pay you, if it is worth anything."

The visitor shook his head decidedly.

"What do you take me fer, uncle? You must think me jolly new. A man don't usually give away his goods an' then take whatever price he can git fer 'em. That hain't business at all, old cove."

"You need not think to swindle me out of a sum of money on an uncertainty."

"You won't pod?"

"I will not go into anything blind."

"So? Well, now look here, Mort, even if I didn't know a thing about the young snipe, you'd pay me good boodle ter keep my mouth shut 'bout certain other things."

"Not one cent!"

"Come off! You hain't an ijee what I know."

"And I do not care, unless it is something about Walter. You are wasting time by not coming to the point, and I cannot spare time for such a rascally wretch as you."

"Your moments must be vallyble, uncle. Well, I s'pose they be, seein' as how you hain't got a great menny more years to rustle around in this world. The old feller with ther cloven hoof has prepared a good warm corner fer you, an' he's keepin' a whole gang of little imps busy gittin' things up to a dead white heat. They'll have— Steady, there!"

With a tiger-like spring, he again flung himself on the old man, just in time to prevent Morton's fingers from touching the bell.

"Well, you are bound to make a fool of yerself!" Sukes snarled. "I may have to—"

"I will call for help!"

"Raise your voice and it will be a black moment for you, you old bigamist!"

He sent those words seething from his lips, and they seemed to take every spark of life from the broker's body. Morton sunk back in the chair, helpless as a babe, a look of horror in his eyes.

Even then Ben Sukes did not release his hold. He seemed astonished by the sudden collapse of the broker and apparently thought it a ruse to fling him off his guard.

But it was no trick on Horace Morton's part. With three words, the visitor had completely unmanned the broker and broken down his nerve. The master of the house did not even have enough strength left to speak, although he tried to do so, as the movement of his lips plainly showed.

Around Horace Morton's mouth there was a pinched look, and despair seemed suddenly to have seated itself upon his rounded shoulders. He trembled visibly, and thus he lay back in the easy-chair, staring aghast at the leering devil who stood before him.

Convinced that there was no shamming about the old man's sudden collapse, Sukes had straightened up, but did not offer to be seated again.

"Well, well!" he chuckled, evil triumph written on his face. "I did knock the wind out of you that time, for sure! That was a dead center shot, and it struck a deep."

"Now, my dear sir, I reckon you'll see that I hain't foolin'. It is business straight from ther shoulder. If I hadn't had any reason fer comin' here, I shouldn't have come, you can gamble. But I knew what I was about all ther time."

Morton's lips moved, but he was still speechless.

"Take it easy, old boy," advised Sukes. "There hain't no need of gittin' so worked up over a little thing."

"You devil!"

The words came faintly, almost inarticulately, from the shaken broker's lips.

Sukes bowed.

"If that's what you want to call me, I won't kick. I hain't fussy 'bout little things, an' you won't find me hard to deal with, if you're inclined to do the right thing."

"What—what do you—know?"

"Not a blanked thing so long as I have two silver dollars to rub each other in my pocket. When I git broke, I know a dead heap, you can gamble."

The old man started up, with a great effort, savagely but weakly protesting:

"It is not true! How dare you accuse me! I will make you smart for this! I will—"

"Now you are gittin' all worked up, uncle. It don't pay in the end. You're old, and you might go off the hooks in one of these spells. If you don't have any care fer yerself, I think you oughter be careful fer my sake."

"You—you—"

"There, there; that will do! It is useless, an' it's wastin' time. You ought to know that. Time is said ter be money, but I never have been able ter swap any of my spare time fer cash. Whenever I've tried it, some fool's wanted me ter work later ther bargain."

Horace Morton lay back in his chair, closing his eyes and trying to regain control of himself before he uttered another word. He felt he had betrayed himself already, but he was not going to sink any deeper till he understood just how much this man knew.

As for Sukes, he thrust his hands into his pockets and whistled softly a snatch of a popular air, apparently being perfectly at his ease.

Opening his eyes, Morton saw this, and it filled him with such fury that he could have throttled the insolent rascal, had he possessed the strength.

The tough seemed to care nothing at all for the broker's rage, so long as he did not ring the bell and call the servants. That was something Sukes meant to prevent.

After a few minutes, Morton straightened up in his chair, staring hard at the visitor, who was still standing.

"Sit down," he commanded.

"With pleasure," bowed Ben, resuming the seat close at hand. "I almost fancied you had forgotten to ask me to be seated."

"If you wish to have anything further to say to me, you must restrain your insolence. I cannot and will not endure it!"

The intruder pursed his lips and gave a soft whistle.

"Now, come off, Mort," he calmly advised. "It is useless for you to get on a high boss with me, fer you'll git throwed hard if ye do."

The old broker had resolved not to give himself over to another outburst—he dared not.

"Just what did you mean by the words you uttered a few moments ago?" he demanded.

"What words?"

Sukes pretended the densest ignorance.

The aged broker's hand still shook a little as he lifted it impatiently.

"You know what I mean," he said. "Why will you beat around the bush? You pretended to be all business a little while ago, and now, when I am ready to talk, you stand off."

"If you want to talk with me, you will have ter speak right out what ye mean."

"I had no particular desire to talk with you. You forced yourself upon me, and now—"

"And now you see why I did so."

"You are after hush-money."

"Perhaps."

"For what?"

"For myself, of course."

"That is not what I mean. What do you know that you demand hush-money of me?"

"I know enough ter put you in the tightest corner you ever occupied in all yer life."

"Saying so is not proving it."

Horace Morton's lips uttered the words, but he could not conceal his fear. Sukes took no pains to hide the grin of satisfaction with which he greeted these words.

"I can prove all I want ter, you bet," he nodded. "You have a pretty young mistress here in ther house, an' she thinks she is your real wife. All ther time, there is another woman livin' in this city who has a prior claim ter ther name of Morton."

"Bahl! You say this, but it is no proof. I deny it!"

"And lie in your throat when you do, old boy! I expected you ter squirm, an' I shall put on ther thumbscrews, if they are needed."

"Have a care! I will have you in the grip of the law for blackmail!"

"And I will expose you just so sure as you try it! I'm no fool. Look here; I know the woman who is your real wife, an' I know how you tried to buy her off when she turned up arter your marriage with the present claimant to the name of Mrs. Horace Morton. She did take a big sum of money an' promise never ter trouble you ag'in, but when she'd blcwed in all

your boodle, she wanted more. Then trouble began. You've bin refusin' ter have anythin' ter do with her, an' she's ready ter expose ye."

"She can't prove a thing! I have destroyed the certificate and all the evidence! It is—"

Right there he suddenly stopped, realizing what he was saying.

"It is a fact that you have given yourself dead away," nodded Sukes, grimly. "I knew you would, but I did not absolutely need ther conviction of yer own tongue. I knew Mary Mayhew before you ever met her, an' we were intimate—very intimate. You only got her second-hand."

"The miserable adventuress!"

"But she was a sharp one—you must acknowledge that, old man. She played you for a stake, and she got it. Did you really fancy that woman was in love with you? Hal! hal! hal! Why, she did not care a pinch of snuff for you! Love! Well, you should have been in my place some years before. Then you would have known what her love was. But she even got tired of me. I brought her no money, you see. On the other hand, I lived from the money her cunning and her charms secured. Why, I have drank champagne that was purchased with dollars not an hour before in your purse!"

Morton gripped the chair and started up, seeming tempted to spring upon the taunting rascal.

"Coolly, coolly!" advised Sukes, laying back easily and appearing in no way alarmed. "Don't make a fool of yerself ag'in, Mort. You'll bring on yer own death, if you don't take it easier."

The broker fell back, gasping out a curse.

"You must be one of Satan's own!" he said.

"Now, not so bad as that! I am only opening your eyes to your own position. I wish you to understand just where you stand. Your position is mighty shaky. You say you have destroyed the certificate of marriage, but you have not destroyed all the evidence, by any means, old fel."

"The justice is dead."

"How about ther witnesses?"

"There were but two. One is dead, I know; and the fate of the other is unknown. He has disappeared."

"He also is dead."

"Hal! you tell me this?"

"Yes."

"It is true?"

"As Gospel."

"Then, where is the proof?"

"The record—"

"Is destroyed."

"Well, you have taken pains to get free of your true wife's power. I believe you thought she was dead when you married again, did you not?"

"Yes."

"That was an artful little trick of hers. She wanted ye ter think so—she wanted ye ter marry again. Then she knew she'd have a grip on ye, and you could demand nothing of her in return."

"But her grip is broken."

"Nary bit, old boy. She was a good deal sharper than you gave her credit for."

"What do you mean?"

"There was more than two witnesses ter that marriage!"

"No, no!"

"Yes, yes!"

"I don't know it!"

"It is true. There were two other men in an adjoining room, and, by ther aid of peep-holes in the wall, they saw it all. I am one of the men, an' I know where to put my han' on the other within the hour."

"My God! I am lost!" cried the broker.

And like an echo to his cry, came another—a smothered sound beyond the partition that divided the library from an adjoining room.

Then there was a sodden sound, as of a falling body.

CHAPTER XXII.

STRAIGHT FROM THE SHOULDER.

DOUBLE-VOICE DAN bounded down the steps, looking in vain for Marlton Edgewood, who had disappeared. A muttered exclamation of dismay came from the detective's lips, and he wheeled swiftly down the street.

At the very first corner he saw Edgewood on another street, walking rapidly along.

"He is making for a car," thought the shadower. "I must follow him and manage to get on the same car, if it is crowded. If it is not—"

He did not complete the sentence, but hastily made some slight changes in his appearance. With a deftness that told of long practice, he attached a false mustache to his upper lip. Then he knocked out the crown of his soft hat and hunched his shoulders so his coat did not seem to fit him.

The alteration was little short of wonderful, and it had been accomplished in a minute. He did not seem like the same man, for the very expression of his face had changed.

"I think this will be enough to deceive him, if he does not get too close," muttered Dan, as

he took the opposite side of the street from Edgewood and hastened along. "If I can nail him at a saloon, I will soon have Norcross on his track."

As Dan anticipated, the portly rascal was bound for a car, and, to the detective's satisfaction, the car was pretty well loaded.

Edgewood swung himself on at the front end, and the shadower took the rear platform, carefully keeping behind a large man, though he apparently made no effort to do so.

But Edgewood was easily followed. He did not appear to have a suspicion he was being trailed, and he was occupied by his thoughts. Dan read the signs of satisfaction on his countenance, and he knew how well the villain was feeling inwardly.

"It will be like him to fill up, if he strikes any of his chums," thought the detective. If he does that, it will be all the easier for Norcross to keep trace of him."

Dan did not have any trouble in following the schemer to a saloon. And there Edgewood did meet some friends and ask them to drink with him. The detective made sure Edgewood thought of remaining at the saloon more than a few minutes, then, leaving a newsboy on the watch at the door, he found a telephone and called Paul.

When he turned to the saloon and placed a quarter in the boy's hand, he found Edgewood still there. And there the man remained till Paul appeared.

Giving his assistant a few hurried instructions, Dan departed in search of De Weasle.

Meantime, Marlton Edgewood, being in a particularly merry mood, proceeded to "fill up" even more swiftly than he was himself aware. When he left the saloon he was not drunk, by any means, but he had absorbed enough liquor to make him ready for anything.

One of the friends he had met in the saloon accompanied him, and they turned their steps toward the Bowery.

"We'll find The Tipper," said Edgewood, who was now known as "Dandy Mac," having returned to his down-town haunt. "I feel like having some sport."

The Tipper was found, and he proposed they should visit the theater where Mamie Winter sung every afternoon and evening. Dandy Mac readily assented to this, but proposed they should go to the room at the back of the house where they could see the girls while they were off the stage between times.

Some theaters have what is called the "cork-room," where outsiders may go and talk with the girls and treat them to drinks. This room is at the back of the stage, and the girls enter it in the same garments they wear during the performance. Not every man who wishes finds admittance to this room, but those who know the ropes or have a "pull" are never denied admission. The Tipper was posted about all these things, and he readily piloted his companions to the place.

As soon as they were inside, Dandy Mac began to look around for Mamie Winter, or "Bessie Blossom," as she was known among her stage companions. He saw half a score of girls in short dresses and tights talking and laughing with as many fellows, most of the latter being of the "dude fraternity." Nearly all the girls were drinking or smoking cigarettes, and the painted blushes on their cheeks seemed no deeper than the natural blushes of shame that should have been there.

"I do not see anything of our little beauty, Ted," said the Dead Game Sport. "She is not here."

"Well, der little chip may be on fer her part," replied The Tipper. "I'll jest ask de girls."

He turned to two giddy creatures near at hand and inquired about Mamie. They both laughed harshly, and one replied:

"Oh, her—she hain't no good! She never comes here."

"Thinks she's too nice!" sneered the other, with an upward toss of her snub nose. "She's a little fool, that's all! She hangs around for a dollar a day and never makes a cent more."

"No, she never gets no snaps," declared the first. "She hain't in it.—Say, are you going to blow us off?"

"Jest you wait a bit till I put his jiblets on der fac's. He's dead smashed on Blossom, an' dat's w'at he's in here fer."

"I should think he could find plenty strikes with more snap in 'em than she has."

Mac had been watching Ted all the while, and he growled when the dapper sport told him what the girls had said.

"Jest let Blossom go fer awhile," advised The Tipper. "Come on over here wid me an' we'll blow dese girls off fer der drinks. Dey're spoonin' wid dem sissy-dudes, but we'll snap dem away from dese fellers. It'll be great sport."

Mac shook his head.

"Count me out," he said. "It's the little Blossom I'm after, and nothing else will satisfy me."

"Well, dere hain't no show of seein' her, so w'at's der matter wid yer? Dese girls are der clean white stuff, an' dey're a jolly crowd. Dey'll give youse heaps of fun, an' you kin see der odder one later on."

"I want to see her now. I wonder if she wouldn't come down if sent for?"

Ted shook his head.

"Dunno, but I guess not. She's an odd chick."

"Well, I'm going to try it."

The Dead Game Sport called one of the *attaches* of the place, and, slipping a quarter into his hand, asked him to tell Miss Blossom a friend wished to see her in the cork-room.

"What name shall I give, boss?" was the question.

"Name, name! Oh, you need not give any name. Just say a gentleman friend, and add that it is very important."

"I'll go youse der drinks it don't work," grinned The Tipper, when the messenger had departed.

"Well, I'll stand you," said Mac. "She will think it some one with whom she is friendly."

"But she won't come down here."

"Then she will send for me to come up there."

But he was mistaken. The girl did neither, and the messenger returned with the reply that she declined to see any one in the theater.

The Tipper laughed, while Dandy Mac scowled blackly, and muttered some savage words beneath his breath.

"Der drinks is on you, old boy!" cried Ted, familiarly slapping the other on the back. "Pony."

They were soon sipping a bottle of wine, and when some of the girls, fresh from the stage, came along, they were invited to "have something."

Dandy Mac had already drank more than was good for him, but he seemed to have utterly lost his usual judgment about such things, and he continued drinking. As a result, he was soon in a decidedly "gay" state of mind, a condition that could turn to ugliness at the least provocation. The rather broad and suggestive talk and jests which passed while the girls were present served to arouse the worst passions of his nature, and he finally arose to his feet, determination expressed on his flushed face.

Ted saw something was up, and he instantly questioned his companion. Mac did not appear excited, but he firmly asserted he meant to see Bessie Blossom at once.

"But youse can't do it, ye know," protested The Tipper.

"I don't know anything of the sort," came grimly from the lips of the portly sport. "I'm not going to be bluffed by a little chit of a girl like her."

"How be yer goin' ter help dat now?"

"If she won't come to me, I'm going to her, and that is the whole size of it."

"If yer do dat, you'll git fired!" protested Ted, greatly distressed at the aspect affairs were taking, for he had brought Mac into that part of the building and was in a great measure responsible for his behavior.

"Fired!" growled Mac. "Who'll fire me?"

"Oh, dey keeps a reg'ler gang for dat biz."

"Well, they'll find they have tackled a hard knot if they attempt to climb me. I'm going up."

And with that assertion, he "made a break." The Tipper attempted to catch his friend's arm, but Mac shook him off and quickly disappeared, swaying a bit unsteadily as he vanished in the passage.

A moment later there were sounds of excited voices and a struggle, then a young man came running into the cork-room, holding onto his cheek with both hands and howling.

"What's the matter?" asked several.

"Oh, it was a big feller!" was the reply. "I refused to let him go up, an' he hit me a wipe on the jaw! He just knocked me all in a heap! Oh, my!"

Meantime, Mac had made his way to the back of the scenes. By chance, he happened to come upon Mamie Winter, who had just emerged from a sort of general dressing-room.

"Hello, my dear!" he saluted, lifting his silk hat. "You're just the girl I'm looking for."

She shrunk back, with a little exclamation of alarm. At a glance he saw she was prettily attired as a rural maiden, her dress only coming to her knees and her arms being bare. She was really as "pretty as a picture," and it is a wonder the wine-fuddled man kept his wits as well as he did.

"Why, I don't know you, sir!" she asserted.

"Then that is your loss—and mine, as well. I am one of the best fellows you ever met. I always treat the girls right royally, and they all swear by me."

There was a look in his flushed face and his glittering eyes that made her shiver. She did not fully understand what it meant, but she knew it boded no good to her, and she fell back a pace. He advanced.

"You are a beauty!" he declared, his words coming a trifle thickly. "The Tipper said so, and by Jove! he didn't lie! I really believe you are the most charming girl I ever saw."

"Sir!"

She attempted to stand on her dignity, but it did not work with him. He had passed the point when he would care for her scorn, and she realized it almost instantly.

"Now don't be foolish, my darling!" he said,

forcing her toward a corner, his hot breath fanning her cheek. "There is no reason in the world why you should kick up rusty, you little witch. I have money—"

"I do not want your money!" she hoarsely gasped, despair in her eyes. "Let me alone, or I will scream!"

"Don't you dare scream!" he hissed. "Gods! how beautiful you are! You are young, fresh and fair! Your features are perfect! your flesh is soft and white! The very touch of you makes my blood leap hotly, madly in my veins! Go with me! I will take you from this wretched life—I will give you fine dresses—jewels—handsome apartments—anything! You shall live like a queen! It will—"

With a mad effort, she sent him staggering backward, but when she attempted to dart past him, he caught her wrist. The next minute she was in the madman's arms.

"Not so fast, my beauty!" he breathed. "Anyway, I will have a kiss from those lips or—"

With her clinched hand she struck him fairly in the face. Once more she broke away from him and ran, but he came stumbling in pursuit. Blinded by a nameless terror, she rushed through the wings and out upon the stage. There she halted and looked around, her attitude one of terror, an appeal expressed on her handsome face.

"Help!" she cried. "I am pursued by a— Oh, will no one save me from this man?"

Had he not been liquor-blinded, Mac would not have followed her on the stage, but he stopped for nothing. He rushed on in the full glare of the footlights.

"Save me!" the girl again cried, cowering on her knees.

"Allee lightee," replied a voice. "Chinamane slave 'Melican glil, you bettee. Watchee Ling See knockee splotee lof 'Melican mashee."

Then what appeared to be a genuine Chinaman vaulted over the heads of the orchestra and landed on the stage. Just as Dandy Mac's hand was on the terrified girl's shoulder, the fist of Mamie's champion caught the Dead Game Sport right under the left ear.

It was a corker, and the portly masher took a sudden and violent tumble.

CHAPTER XXIII.

PAUL PLAYS THE CHAMPION.

THUS the audience was treated to an entertainment not down on the programmes, and, it being the kind of an entertainment that suited that class, they howled their delight.

"Go for him, Pig-tail!"

"Give him another!"

"Hurro fer China!"

"Git up, you duffer!"

"Smash der Chineel!"

"Down wid der haythen!"

From their cries, it was plain the spectators were divided in their preference, some championing the Chinaman and some being against him.

The Mongolian danced around the man he had so neatly knocked down, flourishing his clinched fists and calling:

"Gittee lup on lum fleet, gittee headee smash! I'm velly blad bloy, allee samee like John L. Sullymanee! Gittee up, Ling See knockee lung lout! No foollee loud 'Melican glil when she no wantee. Wow-wow!"

At this, one part of the audience howled with delight and another part howled with derision. Never before in the history of the place had there been such an uproar there.

Dandy Mac struggled to his feet, just as, at the Chinaman's suggestion, the girl hastened from the stage. The liquor-infuriated man made a lunge at his foe, and in another moment, a stand-up fight was taking place on the stage.

The audience arose to its feet as one man, and from the rear of the theater two policemen tried to fight their way forward.

By this time, the stage manager had awakened to what was taking place, and he rushed on the stage, calling some of his assistants to follow.

"Dump the blank fools!" he shouted.

Four or five men grasped the two belligerents and hustled them to the front of the stage, unceremoniously kicking them down over the footlights.

In their fall, the fighters were torn apart, and the Chinaman, who was Paul Norcross in disguise, felt his pig-tail snatched away. Being half-buried by the excited mob and fearing arrest when the row was all over, he tore away his upper outside garment and arose in his shirt sleeves, transformed from a Chinaman to a Yankee, with paint-daub on his face.

Every one seemed to be looking for the Celestial to emerge from the squirming mass, and, strange to say, Paul was scarcely noticed at all.

In truth, he was not recognized as the Chinaman.

He comprehended this almost instantly, and, crouching, he forced his way through the crowd, keeping his head well down. In trying to get out, he brushed against a policeman, who did not dream the man he was looking after was within his grasp.

And Paul was actually fortunate enough to escape from the theater.

He immediately hastened to a neighboring saloon, which, happily, was nearly deserted. He did not fancy it was best to tell the whole truth, and so he informed the barkeeper he had been playing the part of a Chinaman in the theater and there had arisen a little trouble. After the purchase of a glass of beer at the bar, he was permitted to wash in the toilet-room, and so removed the last trace of his make-up from his face.

A Jew clothier did business next door, and Paul soon purchased a plain gray suit and a hat, putting the articles to immediate use. When he returned to the theater, no one would have dreamed he was the Chinaman who had leaped upon the stage and acted as champion of the "Melican glil."

But, in his absence, the very thing he feared had taken place.

Dandy Mac had been aided by friends to get safely away, thus escaping the clutches of the police.

Paul felt chagrined.

"What will Downing say?" he muttered to himself. "He will surely think I am no good. What was I to do? That was Mamie Winter, and I could not see that half-drunken whelp insult her before all those people. I was up on that stage before I realized what I was doing. Well, whatever Downing says, I will have to stand it."

Having lost Edgewood, he decided to see Mamie when she came out, and so he took his place at the stage-entrance. There he waited till the girl appeared, more than an hour later.

She looked pale and frightened when she came out and glanced apprehensively around. A little cry escaped her lips as Paul stepped forward, lifting his hat.

"Don't you know me?" he asked.

She shook her head.

"I am Mr. Norcross," he hastened to explain. "I walked home with you and Little Tim last night."

Her face lighted up instantly.

"I remember you now!" she cried, her hand touching his arm. "And I am so glad you are here! I—I am afraid!"

"Of what?"

"Oh, such a terrible thing took place in there to-day!"

Her chin quivered and tears came into her beautiful eyes. Her little hand trembled on his arm.

He was about to speak, when she added:

"If you could spare the time, Mr. Norcross, I wish—you—would—"

"My time is yours, little girl," he hastened to declare.

"You are so kind! I want you to walk home with me, for I am really afraid to go alone."

"And you trust me?"

"I do. I know not why, but I feel safe with you."

"Your confidence shall never be betrayed, Miss Winter."

"You seem like—a—a father," she faltered.

He laughed a little, and they started along the street. At Bleecker they took a car.

"You say something terrible happened in the theater?" he said, when they were seated side by side in the car.

"Oh, yes! It makes me shudder to think of it!"

"Would you mind telling me about it?"

"No. It was like this: Somebody sent up from the cork-room for me to come down, saying a friend wanted to see me. Now I knew it was no friend, for I do not go to that room and my friends do not go there. I refused to go down. Sometimes the manager gets angry with me because I will not go there. He has threatened to discharge me, but has never kept his threat."

"It was more than half an hour after I refused to go down that, just as I was coming out of the chorus-girls' general dressing-room, a dark-faced man confronted me. He would not let me pass, and the things he said frightened me. I tried to escape him, but he forced me toward a corner. When he would have kissed me I grew desperate and struck him with my clinched hand—oh!"

She paused with a shudder, as if she had done a terrible thing, and her cheeks, which had been unusually pale, flushed a deep red.

"You did right, little one," nodded Paul. "I admire your grit!"

"But it seems like a terrible thing."

"It was not terrible at all; it was not half what the whelp deserved!"

After a moment, she went on:

"When I struck him, he released his hold for a moment and I ran. But I saw he was pursuing, and, frightened nearly out of my wits, I ran on the stage, crying out for help. He followed. And then—"

"He got the thumping he deserved!" exclaimed Paul, forgetting himself for an instant.

"I wish I had cracked his thick skull!"

Mamie stared at him in astonishment.

"You?" she exclaimed.

He was confused, for he had not intended to betray himself, but now saw it was too late to retreat.

"Yes," he said, laughing awkwardly. "I was

the individual who had the honor of thumping his head."

"Why, sir, it was a Chinaman!"

"Apparently—but you know appearances are often deceptive. The Chinaman was no Chinaman at all."

She was astounded.

"Why—why, I don't understand!" she faltered.

"And I scarcely wonder you do not. My make-up was pretty good, and you were excited. But, if you remember, the Chinaman spoke to you in good common English when he told you to get out of sight quickly."

"You know I was playing the part of a Dago last night. To-night I was a Chinaman. I was shadowing that very man who insulted you, and so was in disguise, for he knows me well. It was greatly to my delight that I had a chance to punch him a few, though I lost him in the muss that followed."

Still she wondered. It seemed marvelous that this man at her side had been the pig-tailed Celestial who so nimbly vaulted on the stage.

"Do you doubt me?" he asked.

"Oh, no, no!" she hastened to say. "But it seems so strange! It is—"

"I know it must seem strange," he confessed, when she paused. "I did not mean to give myself away, but did so before I realized what I was saying."

"Then you are the one I have to thank for saving me!"

"You have to thank no one. I was only too glad, as I have said, to get a good chance to punch Marlton Edgewood's head."

"But I must thank you! If you had not come to my aid—well, I do not know what horrible thing would have happened. Everybody seemed asleep—but you."

"For which they should be sincerely ashamed."

"How can I ever show my gratitude?"

"By not mentioning it again."

He saw her gratitude in her eyes. No matter if her lips were silent, he knew how thankful to she was in her heart.

For a little they were silent, and then the girl turned to him, saying:

"You must not mention this to mother, Mr. Norcross. I would not have her know it for the world! All I fear is that it will get into the papers and she will see an account of it. I must warn Tim against leaving any papers that may have an account of it."

"Why do you not wish her to know?"

"She would not let me go back to the theater at all. She was opposed to my going there, but I had to have some money when I lost my place in the store."

"You do not like this sort of life?"

"Oh, no, no! I detest it! But what can I do? We must live, and so I must earn money. It is the only opening I have, and I fear I shall lose even this."

"Fear you will lose it?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Oh, you know nothing about it, sir! Almost all the girls dislike me—yes, hate me! They think I am stuck up because I will not go down to the cork-room and drink wine and smoke cigarettes with the men who come in there. They tell stories about me, and they are getting every one about the theater down on me. Before this terrible affair to-night the manager told me to look sharp or I would get the bounce, and now—"

"And now."

"Well, he gave me an awful dressing down after it was all over."

Paul closed his lips firmly, a stern look coming to his face.

"He did talk dreadfully!" half-sobbed the girl.

"The brute!"

She started at the exclamation of her companion.

"What did he say?" asked Paul.

"Oh, I cannot repeat all the things he said!" she protested, a hot flush coming to her cheeks. "He told me I was a little fool, and said I had better let the man kiss me than raise such a rumpus. He said that I should be fired if I did not come to time."

"What did he mean by 'come to time'?"

"Oh, I suppose he meant for me to be like the other girls. I know they thought I would soon be like them when I went in there, and they are disappointed because I remain obstinate."

"The monsters!" exclaimed Paul. "They are trying to wreck your life, little girl, and you must not stay in that place!"

She half-started up in alarm.

"Oh, I must stay there!" she gasped.

"Where else can I go? What else can I do? You do not understand the situation, sir!"

"I think I do, Miss Winter," he said, soothingly. "You are, indeed, in a desperate place, but some other channel must open to you."

"In no other way can I earn six dollars a week. I would take in sewing, but, if I was skillful, I could not earn as much as I am now—and I am not skillful with the needle. This is

the only thing I can do. If I lose my place here, I know not what will become of us!"

The man remembered his desperate strait of a few days before, and he was silenced for a time. To him it seemed a terrible thing that this fair and pure young girl should be so entangled by the meshes of want, which threatened to drag her down to wreck and ruin. She was fighting the battle bravely, but how long could she hold out against the temptations which would be brought to bear against her? Her strength was not superhuman, and she would be forced to succumb in the end. With the first false step taken, she must go down swiftly into the whirlpool of sin that destroys so many fair young lives in the great city. Thus far she had held out, but foul means to overcome her might be employed.

The stern look deepened on the man's face.

There must be some way to save this fair young girl.

But how?

He asked himself the question in vain. The answer was not ready.

"You must continue to be brave, my little girl," he said, in a half-faltering way. "Something will open before you, be sure of that. This will not always continue."

"No, no; it can not!"

"There is an old saying that the darkest hour comes before dawn."

Her face cleared a bit, and she half-smiled, as she said:

"Then the dawn must be very near at hand."

"Have you no relatives in New York?"

"None in this country, sir. Our relatives are all in England. Father would not have come here, but he was unfortunate in a certain venture, and all he possessed was swept away. He thought he might recover a fortune in the New World, but he was unsuccessful."

"It is the same old story," muttered the man. "Thousands upon thousands have sailed for America with the same hope and met the same bitter disappointment. It seems your folks were not always poor?"

"Oh, no! My mother's brother is very wealthy, but there was trouble between him and father. They quarreled."

"Does he know your father is dead?"

"I think not, sir. He has refused to receive any communication from mother. She wrote him several times, but her letters were returned unopened."

By this time they had reached the place where they were to leave the car.

CHAPTER XXIV.

NOTHING BUT DREAMS.

"It's too bad for you to have to live in such a quarter as this," declared Paul, as they went down the street together. "This must be a terrible place at night. Look at the people on the street, and the rum-shops we have passed! Why, some of these fellows look as if they would tackle a man in broad daylight! They are desperate."

"It is true," sighed the girl. "Robberies have been committed here in the open light of day. I am always fearful till I reach our door. Some of the men eye me in a way that makes me tremble, and these women often sneer at me."

"Wretched creatures! Their own ruin is wrought, and they feel hatred for any one who has not fallen to their own level. There seems any amount of dark-complexioned people here."

"Yes, negroes abound. If we could afford it, we would get out of this neighborhood. Mother is always talking of moving."

Before they reached Mamie's home they were met by Tim, who came limping to meet them, looking suspiciously at Paul, whom he did not recognize at first.

"Hello, Tim, my lad," called the amateur detective, pleasantly. "How are you to-day?"

The lame lad's face lighted up, and he lifted his battered hat.

"I did not know you, sir," he declared. "I am glad to see you, and I am very well, I thank you."

"You show your breeding, Tim, and it is a credit to Mrs. Winter."

"How have you done to-day?" asked Mamie.

"Boss!" was the reply. "I had jolly good luck, and I sold every one of my papers. If I could only do as well every day I would make a fortune! We'd have a house of our own, then, Mamie!"

She laughed, and, hand-in-hand, they went down the street together. Paul walked along and listened to their talk.

The girl thought it best to explain how the gentleman came to be with her, and Tim listened breathlessly. When the story was finished he offered his hand to Paul, saying:

"Put it there, sir! You're the boss man! I wish I had been there to see you hit that other fellow! Did you give it to him good?"

"Well, I did my level best, Tim," laughed Norcross, as they shook hands.

"You are good to us, sir," said the boy. "When I grow up, I'm going to look out for Mamie, if I get this crick out of my leg and

back. I'm afraid I'll not be good for much unless I do."

Mamie cautioned Tim not to let her mother know anything, and Paul was invited in when the house was reached. He did not wish to enter, but Tim got hold of his hand and would not let him escape.

Up three flights they went, the stairs being bare and none too steady. The man shuddered at the place. There were dirty women and children to be seen at every landing, and sounds of singing and weeping came from the rooms at either side—maudlin sounds that were not pleasant to hear.

Mrs. Winter admitted them when they reached the top. She was a pleasant-faced little woman, on whom the sorrows she had seen had left no marks. She was dressed neatly and plainly, being greatly in contrast with the women the man had just seen.

The rooms were low and rather devoid of furniture, but everything was as clean as soap and water could make it. The place looked neat and tidy and smelled wholesome. An open skylight admitted purer air than could be obtained from the air-shaft.

Paul was made to feel at home, and, after a few minutes' conversation, the widow set about preparing dinner. Mamie assisted her, and the visitor was left with Limpy Tim.

The lame boy did his best to amuse Paul, and the man was interested in the bright little fellow. He again asked all the particulars concerning Tim's injury.

"It is strange you can't remember anything of your life before you were hurt," he said.

"Do you ever try to remember?"

"Oh, yes, sir! I have tried and tried, but it is useless—it will not come back to me."

"You do not even remember anything at all?"

"Oh, sometimes I almost seem to. I think I will remember in a few moments, for it seems so near, but it all goes away. Then it is blank again, and it makes me cry."

"Poor little lad! Was there no mark on your clothes by which your past might have been traced?"

"Not that I know of, sir."

"Well, it is a most sad and unfortunate case."

"Oh, I don't mind—much," the boy cheerfully declared. "I'm pretty well satisfied."

"But you may have been the son of some rich man."

Tim started up, a trace of excitement on his face.

"I've thought so," he declared. "And, though I can't remember, I sometimes dream of a beautiful home and everything fine. It seems as if the place was my home, and I see a pretty woman who is my own true mother. Oh, I love that dream, and it comes to me again and again! It is almost always the same."

Paul was interested. It flashed across his mind that there might be more in the boy's dream than would seem possible. Perhaps the dream was caused by the memory that would not come to him in his waking moments.

"Look here, Tim," he said, "can you remember just how that woman looks in your dreams?"

"Yes, sir. She is beautiful—beautiful!"

"But that does not describe her. What colors are her hair and eyes?"

"Dark. And oh, she has such beautiful eyes! She seems so young, too, that even in my dream I wonder if she can really be my mother. At times I dream she is calling to me. I will answer: 'Here I am, mother.' Then I run to her, and she falls on her knees and puts her arms around me and kisses me and cries with joy."

Paul Norcross was breathing heavily. There was an eager light in his eyes and a flush on his bronzed face. He looked like a man who had struck a trail—who had seen a great light.

"Tim," he said, holding himself in check, "would you know that woman, if you saw her?"

"Yes, sir, anywhere. And once—once I thought I caught a glimpse of her face in a closed carriage up at the Park. I went up there with Mamie to see the trees and flowers and beautiful things. We were watching the splendid carriages go by when, all of a sudden, I saw a woman looking out of one of them. The face was that of my dreams."

"What did you do?"

"At first I was so surprised I could not do a thing, but when I saw the carriage going on, I sprang up and cried out to her."

"Did she see you?"

"I think not."

"And the carriage went on?"

"Yes," sighed the lame lad, tears coming into his eyes; "it went on and I lost sight of it with the others. I never saw it again, and I have not seen that face since."

Paul sprang to his feet and paced across the small room.

"Great Heaven!" he breathed. "Have I found the lost heir?"

CHAPTER XXV.

THE HORRORS OF DARKNESS.

GAGGED, bound and helpless in the darkness of a dank, foul-smelling cellar-room lay Walter St. Cyril. Consciousness had returned to him.

and he knew he was a captive in the hands of men who would not hesitate at any crime to gain their ends.

His jaws ached and his position was cramped. He moved to get into a more comfortable position, and a rat ran squeaking into the darkest corner.

The sound filled him with a sickening feeling of horror, for it told him that, helpless as he was, he might become the prey of scores of filthy rodents. They would find him there, and, realizing his helplessness after a time, fling themselves upon him.

And then—

God! What a horrible thing to think of! What a terrible death to die! The ravenous, squealing horde would fasten their sharp teeth in his flesh! The taste of blood would infuriate them! Nothing could beat them off then. They would secure their fearful feast, and he would actually be eaten alive, the choking gag preventing him from uttering more than a gurgling groan!

"No, no!" he thought. "I will not die thus! There must be some way for me to get free! Oh, if I do, that devil shall suffer! He has no mercy—he means to kill me! I am not dead yet!"

He struggled savagely to free his hands, but did not succeed. Then he tried to work the gag from his mouth, but in that he also failed.

At length, he sunk down helplessly, a hollow, muffled groan coming from beyond the gag. He felt there was no such a thing as escape unless some one came to his assistance. And who would come there to render him any assistance? Desperate, indeed, was his position.

Again and again he tugged at his bonds, always falling back breathless and exhausted. It seemed that the gag would choke the life out of him. His jaws ached and he was fairly frantic with the desire to close them. His horrible sufferings brought cold beads of sweat out on his face.

Finally, he managed to get into a sitting posture, his back against the slimy wall. But what good was that? His head reeled and bright lights seemed flashing in the darkness of the room. At times it would seem as if the whole place was illuminated, but he could not see the walls. He knew the lights were creations of his overstrained brain.

In his ears many-toned bells were ringing. At times he was tempted to believe he did really hear them. Then, after what seemed hours of hellish torture, he was seized by a desire to laugh!

"My God!" he thought. "I am going mad!"

Then another horrible fancy came over him. He seemed to see the rats swarming toward him from all quarters of the cellar. He could see them all as if they were covered with phosphorus. They came forward slowly, their little eyes gleaming wickedly and their sharp teeth grinding.

Rats! They were not all—there were snakes with them! Yes, and out of the corners crept the most horrible red lizards, seeming determined in joining in the feast.

Creeping, creeping, creeping!

They were coming toward him—they were on every hand! He tried to shriek—he tried to scramble up. With a horrible gurgling sound, he fell over on his side.

What was that?

Another sound! Some one coming!

He managed to sit up once more. The horrible creatures had disappeared, and he was alone in the darkness of the cellar.

A ray of light! It was no phantasma of his brain. It came through the chinks of the wall. There was a fumbling sound, and then a door creaked as it swung open.

The light poured into the cellar, and in the doorway appeared De Weasle, a candle in his hand.

"Crackey!" muttered the treacherous gamin. "Dis hain't no parlor! I've see'd heaps better places den dis. Wonder how his nibs is feelin'? He must be in mon-str'us need of comp'ny, so I'll go in an' cheer der poor cove up."

He entered the cellar, but started back with a cry of surprise and astonishment when he saw the captive's ghastly face and wildly glaring eyes.

"Hokey!" he gasped. "Is dis der feller? Gingerbread! It don't look like him! He was just a lu-lah, an' did mug— Say, w'at's der matter wid yer?"

Of course Walter did not rely, for the gag prevented.

De Weasle bent forward, placing his left hand on the knee of his ragged pantaloons, while his right hand held the candle close to Walter's face. He scrutinized the young man closely, and then shook his head.

"Dis kind of business hain't good for his health," soberly declared the gamin. "Why, dis mug 'll have der high-frum-duddy if he's kept here in der twilight! I've got ter see 'bout dis."

Walter uttered a gurgling sound.

"Now, dat hain't right," asserted De Weasle, straightening up and looking at the gag. "W'at dey want ter chuck dat inter his jaws fer? Dere hain't no danger of his raisin' anybody down in dis place. He might squeal his

head off, an' nobody 'd pay any 'tention ter him. No," he solemnly concluded, "dis hain't no fair shake."

Having arrived at this decision, he set the candle on the ground and approached the captive.

"Kinder guess you'd like dat wad taken outen your mout', eh, boss?"

Walter nodded.

"Den I'm dashed if I don't take it out!" the gamin declared. "Dis business is more den I bargained fer anyhow. I hain't no fool ter git me head inter a trap, but I didn't count on der game bein' dis bad. If I had—well, Sukes could 'a' gone ter grass 'fore I'd lifted a finger. But now I'm in de mess, I'm in ter stay, you bet."

"Dere, how's dat—better?"

While speaking, his dirty fingers had been busy removing the gag. Walter found it was not possible for him to immediately speak, and so he nodded in reply to the street Arab's question.

De Weasle sat down on the damp ground and clasped his knees with his hands, eying Walter in a peculiar manner.

"Youse had a bad look on w'en I poked me head in," the gamin asserted. "Ey jinks! dem eyes of yourn jest give me de cold jiggers! I s'pose youse must felt kinder lonesome down here 'bout nobody ter cheer yer up?"

The captive nodded again. Indeed, he was delighted with the company of De Weasle, preferring any to darkness and solitude in that wretched place.

"Dat gag must put your jaws in a bad way, boss. Dey oughter taken it out w'en dey got yer down here. Tain't no good ter keep a feller gagged down here, fer it don't make no dil' how much he squawks. Dey can't nobody hear him dat'll pay 'tention. Dey put der gag in so yer wouldn't give dem away w'en dey was sackin' yer down, but dey'd oughter took it out."

"The gag was bad enough," said Walter, with a shudder; "but I could stand that better than the darkness."

De Weasle elevated his eyebrows.

"So? Well, I don't keer a pinch fer der dark, but I wouldn't like ter have me jaws pried open in dat way and braced dere. Dat must be tough."

"I would give more for a light than everything else. This place is full of rats."

"Well, you don't mind dem, I hope? I've got used to dem fellers. Why, I wakes up in der night now an' den an' feels runnin' over me legs."

Walter shuddered.

"Hel hel!" laughed the street urchin. "Dat gives you der shivers now, but you wouldn't mind it arter ye got used ter it. Dere hain't no water in your blood, fer I've seen yer in a tight corner. I reckon you'd done fer der all t'ree if I hadn't give yer der trip. Say, boss, der yer know I'm kinder 'shamed of dat—I honestly am!"

The captive looked inquiringly at De Weasle, inclined to believe the young rascal was chaffing, but the boy seemed honest in his assertion.

"It was playin' yer dirt, boss," he declared, "an' I owns up ter dat. But I saw youse was gittin' der best of der gang an' somet'in' must be did, so I sails in. You did give me one kick in der jaw just 'fore I grappled ter yer propellers, but I got a holt an' hung fer biz. Then you took a flop an' der gang piled onter yer."

"But dey never give me no credic fer dat," added De Weasle, sadly. "Sukes didn't even let me inter der game he was workin', dough I'm onter der racket now. Spot—he's one of der odders—Spot he gives me a tip, an' you bet yer hoodle der boss 'll have ter come down w'en he settles in full wid yours truly. I'm a reg'lar squeezer w'en I go fer der needful."

A sudden thought flashed through the unlucky young man's head. Perhaps this unscrupulous gamin could be bribed to turn traitor to Sukes. Walter resolved to try to tempt the street Arab's cupidity.

CHAPTER XXVI.

BRIBING DE WEASLE.

"Look here, my boy," said Walter St. Cyril, speaking as calmly as possible, "do you fully understand what you have done?"

"You bet yer hoodle I do," was the prompt reply, in anything but a reassuring manner.

"It is pretty sure to go hard with you for this job."

De Weasle scowled.

"Now look here, mister, you hain't got no call ter tork dat way. 'Member w'at I've done fer ye."

"I remember it, and it makes me think your case may not be hopeless, although it looks black."

"Reckon youse one of dese morrylizers, eh?"

Walter did not reply to this mild insinuation, but continued on the plan he had hastily mapped out in his brain.

"You are just stepping into the path of crime, my boy, and, if you do not turn back now, it will soon be too late. You will be marked by the police, and from then you will go down

swiftly. The best part of your life will be spent within prison-walls, and you may end your career on the gallows."

The gamin still scowled and dug his heels into the ground.

"Say," he broke out, "do youse know I hates der perlice? Dey're no good on earth!"

"That is all on account of your bringing up. If you had been brought up rightly, you would not think that way."

"I dunno 'bout dat," grinned the boy. "I've seen some honest people dat called der croppers N. G."

"But I want you to think of what you have done."

"Well, I don't want ter think northin' 'bout it."

"It may not be too late for you to turn back."

"Rats!"

"If you will listen to reason—"

"Say, youse hain't got no call ter preach ter me. I don't like preachin', an' I'll shake yer if ye sticks ter this line. See?"

"It is for your good. I have hope of saving you from a terrible fate."

"Come off! Youse don't love me ser much as dat, an' I know it!"

"You like money."

"Well, I hain't no fool, if I do look like one!"

"It was for money you induced me here?"

"You bet!"

"Well, it will be worth a great deal more for you to assist me in escaping."

De Weasle whistled softly.

"So dat's w'at yer drivin' at! I t'ought dere was somethin' in der breeze."

"I can pay you much more than this Sukes, and you will be taking a step in the right direction," urged Walter, bound to hold out strong inducements to the unscrupulous boy. "That will give you a start in life, and you can become an honest and respected man."

"Oh, dat's a good bluff!" grinned the boy.

"It is no bluff," strongly asserted the captive. "I am in dead earnest. Why should I not be? My position is far from being pleasant, and I do not know what is in store for me."

"Dat's so, boss; nobody knows w'at's laid up fer dem if dey have dealin's wid Sukes. 'Most all der gang are 'fraid of him. I'm 'fraid of him, but I don't let him know it. I'm a diplomat—see?"

"I have great hope that you are as sensible as you seem."

"You kin put up yer property on dat."

"If you are, you will aid me to escape. I will pay you well. Now, how much do you expect to get out of Sukes for what you have done?"

De Weasle looked very stern and determined. "Oh, I've goin' ter squeeze him!" he asserted, gravely. "He's got ter come down heavy. He promised me a dollar, but I'm goin' ter stick fer twice dat."

"Two dollars?"

"You bet!"

"And that is all you will get?"

"All! Why, boss, dat's royal good pay fer er soft little job like rakin' a Johnny of your style inter de net!"

Walter paid no attention to the uncomplimentary nature of this declaration, but said:

"Now, how much do you suppose I will give you to set me free and show me the way out of this hole?"

"I dunno."

"Well, I will give you a hundred dollars."

The boy leaped to his feet.

"Get out!" he cried. "Who yer tryin' ter work now?"

"I am in sober earnest," eagerly assured the captive.

De Weasle thrust his hands into the pockets of his ragged pantaloons and stared hard at Walter. After a moment, he nodded and said:

"Dat's all right, me dandy; you may be in earnest, but it hain't no go."

The young man's heart sunk.

"No go? Why not! Think—"

"I have, an' dat's jest why I say it hain't no go."

"You must be crazy to refuse such an offer."

"Not any crazy. I'd be crazy if I didn't."

"How—"

"Now, look here, mister; s'pose I was ter do dis?"

"Well?"

"Where'd I be?"

"I don't understand."

"Well, bet yer cash I do! I'd be in der fingers of der perlice 'fore night."

"How so?"

"Why, you'd turn me over."

Walter saw the treacherous gamin judged everybody by himself.

"I swear I would not. Instead of that, I'd assist you to start on an honorable career. I'd give you a lift in life."

"Dat sounds well, but I'm on. I've heard lots of talk 'fore dis. W'at would I have ter make me sure you'd ever pay der hundred dollars?"

"My word."

"No good!"

"It is as good as the money in your hand. I give you my solemn pledge I will pay you the money and you shall not suffer for what you

have done. Think of it—don't be hasty. Right the wrong you have done me and help yourself at the same time."

De Weasle calmly resumed his former position.

"Dat would be a reg'ler fortune ter me," he acknowledged; "but I can't freeze ter it—I dassent!"

"Dare not—why?"

"Sukes."

"You fear him?"

"Well, I know w'at dat cove is!"

"He shall not harm you; I give you my word for that."

"Well, your word hain't no good in dis case, an' I know dat."

"Sukes would be arrested before night, and, behind iron bars, he would not be able to touch you."

"You t'ink so, but dat's 'cause you don't know."

"How could he harm you?"

"He'd give some of der gang de tip."

"Ah!"

"Now youse tumble? Dey'd do der job fer Sukes, if he couldn't get his clawson me. Why, if I was ter set yer loose, young feller, my neck wouldn't be worth northin'! I'd git it twisted 'fore I was a day older, an' dat's w'at's der matter. I tells yer I knows w'at's good fer De Weasle!"

Walter felt his sudden hope dying out in his heart. His scheme was to be a failure after all. Still, he did not give up in utter despair. It might be possible to tempt the boy by a bigger reward.

"My situation is desperate," he said. "I must escape in some way, and I tell you what I will do."

The gamin waved one hand protestingly.

"It hain't not a bit of good," he affirmed. "I don't dast do it, an' dat settles it."

"I will give you two hundred dollars."

De Weasle's eyes looked big.

"Dat's a heap," he admitted; "but it ain't fer dis chicken. I t'ink more of my wind den I do of a thousand dollars. I'd like der cases ter use in my business, but dat business'd receive no funder 'tention from me if I was ter go inter dis deal."

He looked very sad as he said this, and, had the situation been of a different nature, Walter would have been forced to smile. Just now, it was no laughing matter to the young man.

"Is there no way you can help me out without Sukes knowing it?" asked the captive.

Then he saw a sudden gleam fill the street Arab's eyes, and the boy hastily looked toward a corner.

Walter's heart leaped, for he fancied he had struck the right chord.

"If you can do that, it will be all the same," he hurriedly said. "I will give you two hundred dollars, and you shall not be harmed. Is there no way—"

"Keep still!" commanded De Weasle. "Let me t'ink!"

The prisoner's heart beat high with renewed hope, and he watched the boy's working features anxiously. He fully realized how much depended on De Weasle's decision.

The gamin dug his heels still deeper into the ground and scowled more than ever, while he nervously chewed at his under lip. It was evident a battle between fear and cupidity was raging in his breast, and—cupidity won!

"Looker here, young feller," he suddenly whispered, his face pale and grim as he leaned forward and looked anxiously around, "I may be able ter git you out of here, if youse'll go der way I want yer to."

"I'll go any way."

"An' you'll surely pony dat two hundred plunkers?"

"As sure as I live!"

"I wish dere was some way dat I could be sure 'bout dat, but I s'pose I'll have ter take my chances. You won't blow?"

"No."

"Straight goods?"

"Straight goods."

"You won't even tell yer best friends?"

"No."

"'Cause if yer did, it'd git inter der papers an' Sukes'd know jest how it was, an'—well, it'd be good-by, Weasle."

"I will tell no one."

"Den I'm goin' ter help ye some. Let me git at dem strings."

The boy quickly went to work at the cords which held Walter's hands secure, and, after a few moments, he said:

"Dere, dey are so you kin git yer han's out of dem now, but yer mustn't do it right away. Hold stiddy, an' I'll tell yer der kind of plan I'm fer workin'. I have got ter fool dat Sukes, an' he must come an' see yer all right arter I leave yer. Den he can't say I had a han' in der biz—see?"

"Yes, yes!"

"Jest now he's gone ter see some of yer 'lashuns ter raise der wind. He hain't come back yit, but he oughter be here soon, fer he's bin gone long enough. If youse was ter try ter git clear now, he might come 'fore ye had done so, an' den yer soup would be scorched—see?"

"Yes."

"Youse has got ter lay right still till he shows up. Arter he is gone, you kin git outer dis rope an' make a break."

"What if he examined my bonds?"

"Dat hain't likely, fer he'll t'ink if dey have held ye so long, dey'll hold yer longer. But if he should, I'll bet he don't tumble but dey're all right. I took care ter have dem look all right, an' if youse don't go ter pullin' dem, dey'll stay so till you want ter git out."

"Well, what am I to do when I want to leave this place?"

"Sav, youse watch me."

De Weasle took up the candle and went over into the corner toward which he had glanced a few moments before.

"Looker here," he said, holding the light close to the wall. "See dis stone?"

"Yes."

"Well, dis is a mover. I dunno jest how it's fixed, but it works dis way."

The gamin placed his hand against one side of the stone and pushed with all his strength. The stone slowly swung as if on hinges, disclosing a dark opening, barely large enough to admit the body of a man.

Walter caught his breath.

"Now dat stone'll stay dat way jest so long as you hold it," explained the boy. "Der minute you let it go it swings back an' fills der hole—dat way."

He removed his hand from the stone, and it slowly resumed its former position, making the wall once more unbroken.

De Weasle took the candle and returned to Walter.

"Now, arter Sukes comes here an' gits out again," he said, "youse want ter git free an' make fer dat stone. Push it open an' creep in dere. Don't mind it, fer it will close behind yer, but jest you make a break. Mebbe dere won't be no time ter be wasted, an' you won't find it no nice place ter loaf 'round in, anyhow. Youse jest—Hark!"

The boy's keen ears caught a suspicious sound, and, like a flash, he snatched up the gag he had taken from Walter's mouth.

"Take it in!" he excitedly whispered. "Somebody's comin'!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

INTO THE SECRET TUNNEL.

WALTER was quick to understand, and he allowed the gag to be replaced in his mouth. The nimble fingers of De Weasle made it secure with a swiftness that was little short of marvelous. Then the gamin fell back, and said:

"Well, you're a pritty bird, an' dat's der fact! Dis is der kind of a place where we cages birds of your kind. Oh, youse wants der stick taken outer yer mout', do yer? Well, want'll be your master in dis case, an' don't yer fergit dat. I t'ought I'd jest come down an' see if youse was all right an' feelin' well. Yer sin have lots of compny down here, fer der rats will make demselves 'greable if—"

"Hello!" growled a hoarse voice. "You seem ter be makin' yourself agreeable. Who told you ter come down here?"

Ben Sukes appeared.

"Hello, yerself, Sukesie," saluted the gamin, nonchalantly. "I jest come down ter see if his nibs was all right."

"Well, you take a skip out of this," commanded the rough. "You're gitting to make yourself altogether too free. Some time ther house will fall on ve."

"Oh, come off!" retorted the street Arab, with an independent toss of his head. "I'm an, old pard, an' you know dat. Why don't yer let a feller in on der ground floor? W'at's der use of keepin' him out in der cold w'en he's der card w'at won yer der trick?"

Sukes almost gasped for breath.

"Well, I'll be joggled!" he exclaimed. "Your gall does beat ther ragged Dutch! Git a move on, now, and climb out of here!"

He caught De Weasle by the collar and sent him whirling toward the door, assisting him out with a kick. The gamin stopped to call back, half-tauntingly:

"Oh, youse hain't no good, Sukesie! You gotter come down wid der stuff, an' I'll charge yer double fer dat kick."

Then they heard him scramble away in the darkness of the cellar.

"Well, blow that young rat!" growled the man. Then he turned and faced the captive, nearly treading on the candle as he did so.

For some moments Sukes did not speak, but, after a time, a grim smile of satisfaction appeared on his face. Then he crouched on his haunches, saying:

"How are you feelin', young gent?"

Of course the gag prevented Walter from replying, but he returned Sukes's glare with interest.

"Oh, ho!" exclaimed the man. "So we forgot ter take the gag out of your mouth. That was an oversight, and your jaws must be infernally tired. You can whoop all you want to down here, so I'll take the stick out."

He proceeded to do so.

"Feels better, don't it?"

Walter made an apparent attempt to reply, but pretended he could only utter a grunt.

"Well, that was tough," acknowledged the man. "Still, that was only payin' you fer the crack you gave me. That was a swyding old hit! You're 'bout ther worst case I ever tackled, and I fancied you would be soft."

"You are apt to find there is nothing soft about this matter!" Walter evidently managed to say with the greatest difficulty.

Sukes chuckled.

"Oh, you've got life enough in ye ter threaten, I see! Well, you do have grit!"

"Are you aware what you have done?"

"Oh, yes."

"It will lodge you behind iron bars!"

"Mebbe so; mebbe not. We all have to take our chances in this great game of life. I'm takin' mine, and I will acknowledge they are desperate ones. But I'm goin' to win."

"I do not see just what kind of a game you are playing."

"Well, that hain't my fault. I'm playin' for hoodle. You spotted me with a certain female, and I don't know how much of our talk you heard. If you heard some of it, you might spoil the game I am in, so I decided to put you where you would not talk till it was too late to make a muss. Then I would have a double-hitch on ther old jay."

"A double hitch?"

"Yes. I hain't goin' to lay it all out for you, for it'd be a waste of time. You're half the hitch. That uncle of yours sets his life by you since he lost his boy, and he'd fork any money rather than have harm come to you. See?"

"I think I begin to see, but I have hopes you will fail in your dastardly scheme."

"Then you'd better git right over them hopes, for they're no good. I've been to see the old sinner, and I've squeezed a good-sized little sum out of him already. He means to follow it with more, too."

"I wonder how you found admittance to his presence."

Sukes laughed.

"Oh, I have ways an' ways," he declared. "You proved a good card in that respect. He's beginnin' to worry 'bout ye, and when I told him I knew something, he took me right in. Oh, I'm a shrewd one, young feller!"

"You're a contemptible scoundrel!"

"A scoundrel, perhaps, but not contemptible. I play for high stakes, and I will win, I have become tired depending on a woman, now I am free from her. I only wish she was out of the way, for she may take a notion to spoil my game, when she understands what I am at."

Walter did not speak, but a tempest of rage was seething in his heart.

"Oh, I can see you're mad as a wet hen!" chuckled the rascal. "You don't have to warble a word to give that away, for your face shows it."

"I would like to get at your throat!" hissed the captive.

"I don't doubt it, sonny, but ye can't do it, you know."

"What are you going to do with me?"

"Oh, I hain't decided. I may have to kill you off," replied the wretch, in a cold-blooded manner.

Walter shivered.

"You didn't think it was quite so bad as that, did you? Well, I hope it won't be, but you kin be sure I'll look out for Number One. If there is danger of you're makin' it bad for me, into the sewer you go. You'll float out on the river, and how you was done for will always remain a mystery."

"That is where you are mistaken. Murder will out."

"Perhaps so; but if this comes out, I will be in some other country, living like a prince under an assumed name. See? I will be beyond the reach of the cursed detectives. But I don't mean to do you, young feller, 'less I have to. I'm goin' ter skip, and most likely you'll git back to your uncky just a little the worse for wear."

The young man was fearful lest Sukes should take a fancy to examine his bonds, but thus far the man had shown no symptoms of doing so.

"I have taken a fancy you mean to starve me," said Walter, by way of saying something.

"Oh, no," Sukes assured. "You shall git your feed, though it may not be just as good as you have been accustomed to. But you mustn't kick up a row with the cook if it isn't."

"Say, it's funny, but your old uncle didn't mention you arter I brought up that other matter. He was too absorbed in his own scrape, though he was dead crazy to know what had become of you when I first saw him."

"It is plain you have played your cards well thus far," admitted Walter; "but disaster may overtake you yet."

"What you think don't count. Everything I have blocked out goes. You don't have a single word to say about the game, and that is all there is to it. You're laid on the shelf."

The young man could not resist the temptation to say:

"You may find out you are fooling yourself in this matter."

Sukes looked at him in a queer way.

"I dunno as I know just what you mean by that," came slowly from his lips. "You must have gall to fling a bluff in such a scrape as you are in now."

Walter suddenly changed his method of talking. He fancied it might be worth something to try deceiving the rascal by an appeal, and so he put on his most beseeching expression.

"Look here," he said, "I can't stand this! If you'll set me free, I'll make it all right. I'll agree not to make any trouble."

Sukes slapped his thigh and laughed. Plainly he was in good spirits.

"So you change your tune, eh? Well, I thought you would. It ain't no go. I'm not playing the fool, young feller."

"And you need not. Of course you know what you have done and in what light you would stand before the law. Now, I will agree to say nothing about the matter, if you will set me free."

The rascal grinned.

"I tell you it won't work. I know better than to spoil my game now. You may as well keep cool."

Then Walter appeared to become angrier than ever.

"You infernal villain!" he cried, apparently struggling desperately to break free. "If I could only get my hands on you once—"

"But you can't, sonny," laughed Sukes. "We took good care to make them knots solid."

Panting as if with his great exertion, Walter fell back against the wall and glared at the man.

"That's an ugly look," said the rascal, shaking his head. "You would chew me if you could, I can see that. I do really enjoy this, for it pays for the rap you gave me. I swore then that I'd square it."

"Well, I swear now that I will square this! You hear me! The time will come when I will make you suffer for this job!"

"Bah!" cried the villain, contemptuously. "I have no fear of you!"

"You shall learn to fear!"

"You had better guard that saucy tongue, fer it may make you a coffin!"

"A contemptible threat!"

"Well, I mean it, young feller."

"I do not doubt it, for you are low down enough to mean anything!"

Sukes leaned forward and struck the captive with his open hand.

"Better have a little care, younker! I have you foul, and I can make you ache for every word of that sort you speak!"

"Coward!"

It was with the greatest difficulty Walter restrained a mad desire to free himself from the bonds De Weasle had loosened and leap upon the miserable wretch. Indeed, he would have done so had his foot been free, but, as they were, he knew well enough Sukes would get the best of him in the struggle, and thus everything would be ruined by his rashness.

So he restrained himself, waiting for the time of retaliation, which he felt sure was coming.

"That's right," nodded Sukes; "simmer down. You was gittin' hot, and it didn't do you the least good. Now I have seen you are all right, I guess I'll go back and take things easy. I have about two hundred dollars in debts to pay, and your obliging old fool of an uncle has added over the cash to pay 'em. Sides that, he has put up enough to last me a day or two if I don't strike a faro bank."

"Now I reckon I'll go out and have a spread dinner—a reg'lar high old spread, too. Think of me in about an hour, my son."

He picked up the candle and started to leave the cellar.

"Hold on!" cried Walter. "Can't you leave that candle? I do not want to stay here in the darkness—it is terrible!"

Sukes looked surprised.

"So the darkness is one thing the brave boy is afraid of, eh?" he grinned. "Well, a little of it will do you good."

"But there are rats here!" cried the captive, desperately. "They will not come out of if you leave the light."

"The rats won't hurt ye. If you never have anything round worse than them you'll be lucky. So long."

Then he went out.

Walter needed the candle to help him in escaping, but he found he would have to do without it.

As soon as Sukes was gone, he set about freeing himself from the cords. This did not prove as easy a task as he had anticipated from De Weasle's words, but he kept steadily at it, only pausing to rest when he was obliged to do so by exhaustion. His greatest fear was that some one would come and find him before he was fully free of his bonds.

"That would ruin everything!" he hoarsely muttered. "If I were entirely free, I could at least fight for my liberty, and I would have something like a show. But otherwise—"

The thought set him tugging at his bonds once more, and he finally slipped his left hand free.

A great gasp of relief came from his throat.

"Now for my feet!" he softly exclaimed, as he threw the cord from his right wrist.

His very eagerness defeated his haste. His fingers fumbled instead of going to work in a systematic manner. Panting like an over-driven horse, he struggled to undo the knots.

Once he hushed his breath and heard a rustling that told him the rats had come back. But he did not fear them now his hands were free. He knew they would not attack him unless there was a perfect horde of them and they were very hungry.

After a time he freed his feet.

"Thank God!" he earnestly said, as he once more stood erect.

Then he sought the corner where he had seen De Weasle move the stone.

"If I only had that candle!"

But he did not have the candle, and he resolved to do his best without it. Reaching the wall, he set about feeling for the moving stone.

It was uncertain, and his heart was hot with impatience. He felt that he was losing precious time, but there was no other way.

It is not every man who can have his senses about him in such a time, and, although Walter had displayed undoubted courage, he forgot a most important thing just then. Among the things Sukes and his satellites had not removed from the young man's pockets was a metallic match-safe filled with matches.

And Walter did not think of them!

"Great Heaven!" he hoarsely breathed, as he pressed against rock after rock and not one of them moved. "Can I have made any mistake? This must be the corner!"

But he was suddenly assailed by doubts. He fancied it was another corner, and so he felt his way along the wall till he reached it.

But he still remained unsuccessful in finding the stone.

From corner to corner he now made his way till he found it impossible to tell which was the right one. He was completely muddled, and a desperate young man stood there in the darkness of the cell.

"My goodness!" he groaned. "Am I to fail now? No, no! I must find that stone!"

Again he began the search, growing more desperate with each passing minute. It seemed as if he had spent hours in trying to find the moving stone.

"Fool!"

He had suddenly thought of the matches and found them in his pocket.

He quickly lighted one, but it broke off close to the brimstone and fell sputtering to the ground.

He struck another.

This time he was successful, and the light showed he was in the wrong corner. Hastening to the right one, he found the moving stone just as the match burned his fingers and he was compelled to drop it.

At that very instant he heard some one approaching!

He pushed against the stone.

It moved!

Not an instant was to be lost, for some person was close at hand, and a light shone through a chink in the wall.

Holding the stone in its place, he squeezed his body into the opening. It was a close fit, but he succeeded in passing through, finding some more room beyond.

Then the stone swung noiselessly back into place.

CHAPTER XXVIII. PLOTTERS.

It was not an easy task to get track of De Weasle, as Double-voice Dan discovered. The gamin had once been smuggled out of the city, and, now that he was back, he kept well out of sight.

Downing knew the gamins of New York and their haunts, and to them he went for information concerning one who had become famous because of his connection with the Morton Mystery. Yes, they knew De Weasle was back, but he was hanging mighty shy. He had boasted he was making his living by keeping out of the hands of the police.

Where was he? Well, nobody seemed able to tell exactly where he was liable to be found. His home was not known to his street comrades, and he seemed to have no settled haunts.

That was about all Dan could learn. He found one boy who claimed he had seen De Weasle the day before, but the most of them protested they had not seen him for a week.

It was late in the afternoon when Dan decided it was useless to look any further for De Weasle that day. He had other things to attend to, but he would keep his eyes open for the gamin at the same time.

He decided to return to his office, having instructed Paul to ring him up or report there after a certain hour.

Dan was a person who saw everybody on the street. As he was hurrying along, he caught sight of Ted the Tipper, who also seemed in something of a rush. The Tipper did not see the detective, and Dan resolved to follow him, though he scarcely knew why he did so.

He did not have to follow far before the dap-

per sport met another person, as if by appointment.

And that person was Dandy Mac.

"Hello!" thought Double-voice Dan. "I have run right up against Marilton Edgewood. I wonder where Norcross is."

He looked around for his assistant, but saw nothing of him. This did not cause him to wonder much, for he fancied Paul was laying low and keeping out of sight as far as possible.

Now that he had struck Edgewood, Dan resolved to shadow the man himself. He saw the two sports were conversing earnestly but guardedly, and a desire to hear what they were saying came over him. He was about to attempt getting nearer, when, of a sudden, both men turned and went down some steps into a basement saloon.

"I'll take my chances," thought the detective, hastening into a saloon across the street. "I do not believe they will leave that place for two or three minutes, at least."

He entered the toilet-room as Dan Downing, but when he came out two minutes later, he was quite a different man. A full beard had completely changed his appearance, but a pair of spectacles aided the beard in a remarkable manner. He had the appearance of a middle-aged gentleman of leisure.

Across the street to the basement saloon Dan made his way, descending the steps without a pause.

Dandy Mac and The Tipper were standing at the bar, talking in low tones over a brace of cocktails. They glanced at Dan as he entered, but neither recognized him.

Dan was disappointed at finding them at the bar, for he knew they would talk so low it would be difficult to hear anything that passed between them.

But he was daring. Calling for beer he took a position at the bar with his back almost against that of Marilton Edgewood. Had the Dead Game Sport known his detective foe was so near he would have been startled, at least.

Dan's ears were remarkably keen, and he heard The Tipper say:

"It was a bad break dat, old boy."

"That is so," Mac readily agreed. "I had been drinking a bit too freely."

"Now youse shoutin'. You might 'a' got up at der back ef der stage if you'd went at it right, but dat wasn't no way. I didn't tink you'd do dat."

"Why didn't you give me a pointer about getting up behind the scenes?"

"Well, I didn't tink yer was in a condition ter go dere. I tought you'd play der devil if yer did."

"Oh, come—"

"Well, you got dere."

"Yes."

"An' didn't I tink right?"

There was a pause, and Mac laughed shortly.

"I don't know but you did," he confessed. "I'd ought to have known about getting in there without raising a rumpus, as much as I have been around in New York. But I had never been in that place before, and I did not know their rules."

"I kep' yer down fer yer own benefit."

"You were more than kind!"

Without a doubt there was sarcasm in the Game Sport's words, but The Tipper did not mind. It was his boast that his skin was not thin.

"But dat Chinaman, old fel'," laughed the dapper dandy. "Oh, but he was der wu'st!"

Mac growled.

"There's a mystery about him," he declared.

"A mystery?"

"Yes."

"What do you mean?"

"Where did he disappear to?"

"Oh, I dunno."

"Well, nobody seemed to know. He broke away from me when we were shoved off the stage, and I never saw him afterward."

The detective's ears were wide open, and he was drinking in all this with eagerness. He wondered what had happened, but it was plain there had been a collision of some kind between his assistant and Dandy Mac.

"Oh, der cuss sneaked in der crowd," carelessly observed Ted.

"How he did it is the wonder. There were twenty men who declared they tried to get their hands on him, but saw nothing of him after he was hurled into their midst. Now I'll tell you what's the matter."

"You say ye will."

"That Chinaman was no Chinaman at all!"

"En! Great Scott!"

"That's what's what."

"Oh, come off!"

"It's straight, and I know what I think."

"Well?"

"It was that cursed Double-voice Dan in disguise."

The Tipper gave a gasp.

"What makes yer tink dat?"

"One of the crowd caught him by the pig-tail, and the whole business came off in his hands. It was false!"

That Ted was astounded was manifest by the exclamation which came from his lips.

Dan Downing sipped his beer and smiled beneath the cover of his false beard, for he fancied he understood it all now.

"Git out!" softly cried The Tipper.

"Well, I think that is who it was," strongly affirmed Dandy Mac. "You know that blood-bound is following me everywhere. He seems to think I know about that kid."

"Well, I'd never t'ought it was him!" declared the smaller man.

"But you see it probably was?"

Ted acknowledged he could see.

"That cursed whelp is going to make trouble for me, if he is not downed!" growled Mac. "If I could only held on to that Chinaman! But the first thing I knew, I was in the grasp of three newspaper reporters and a policeman. The reporters wanted my story, and the cop was for running me in. I tell you it was a tight corner, and I was lucky to get off by giving a big bluff. It would have been a terrible thing if it had gone to the papers that the well-known Mariton Edgewood was the principal in such an infernally disgraceful affair!"

"Well, youse kin t'ank me fer gittin' yer off. It was my gang dat made der rush an' pulled yer from der cop an' dem reporters."

"I know that, Ted, and I will make it right with you and all the others."

"Make it right wid me, an' I'll make it right wid der odders."

"All straight. But say, I am not done with that girl. The very touch of her set me wild to-day, and I'm going to rake her in."

"Yer can't do dat, pard."

"I can and I will, by fair means or foul!"

"Well, if dere's money in it, I'm wid yer."

"There is money in it, for I will pay you to help me out."

"All right. W'at's der lay?"

"Well, I have not exactly decided."

"W'en be youse goin' ter work it?"

"This very night, if I can."

"Whew! Youse must be started!"

"Never before have I seen a girl who stirred my blood to such a pitch. I have sworn she shall be mine, and I will keep that oath, come what may!"

The Tipper laughed.

"Youse a bad one w'en ye gits after a petticoat," he affirmed.

Mac did not deny the insinuation.

The two men lifted their cocktails.

"Here's to the beautiful Bessie Blossom," said Edgewood.

"And here's luck ter dat scheme," returned Ted.

Then they drank.

"Where can we talk the matter over?" asked Edgewood.

"Right here."

"But I want to go where we can talk freely without being heard."

"Den we'll take one of dem little stalls back dere."

"All right."

As the two plotters moved toward the rear of the saloon, the gentleman with the spectacles and full beard drank the last of his beer.

CHAPTER XXIX.

TRICKED.

DAN made himself quite at home in the saloon. He had the manner of one who had been there many times before. He covertly watched the two sports till they disappeared into one of the two stalls, then he turned to the barkeeper, saying:

"Send me over a bottle of porter and a glass."

With that, he made his way to the other stall.

He feared he would not be able to hear what the plotters were saying, but it was the best he could do. He took a seat with his back against the boards which divided the two stalls, and when his porter was brought, he took the bottle and glass from the hands of the waiter, so a noise should not be made in placing them on the table. Somehow the man seemed to understand he wished to be quiet, and, when paid, he retired without a word.

Without pausing to remove the stopper from the bottle, Dan leaned against the partition and placed his ear at a crack. The hum of voices came to him and he was able to catch several words. He knew the two men were speaking cautiously at first, and he felt sure he would be able to understand the drift of their conversation, if they would only lift their voices a bit or even allow them to assume their natural tone.

He felt it was important he should get an idea of their plans, for he realized they were plotting deviltry, and he hoped to block their little game.

Dandy Mac's words at the bar had revealed to the detective that the rascal was aware he was being shadowed.

"And so he is taking good care not to let me know what he has done with the stolen child," thought Dan. "Is that it? I am inclined to think so. He stole the heir—he means to murder Morton—he thinks he will then secure the heiress. That is his plot. And still old Morton does not love his wife. Will he leave her his wealth, or will she only receive her dowry? I believe

Edgewood is plotting to get the old man to make a will in favor of his wife, and when Morton does that, he will come mighty near signing his death-warrant."

But Dan had no time to think those things over then. He was listening to the few words he could catch, and, as he had surmised might be the case, the plotters were gradually allowing their words utterance in an ordinary tone, thinking there was no danger of being overheard.

"I believe dat is a good plan," The Tipper finally said, quite distinctly.

"And so do I," acknowledged Mac. "It ought to work well."

"I am to git der kid out of der way?"

"Yes."

"Is dat all ye wants me ter do?"

"Well, I want you around for the job of scooping the girl."

"Dis will be mighty bad business if der perlice gits on."

"Well, the police will not get on."

"Do youse mean ter keep der girl caged?"

"I may have to for a time," said Mac. "She will come to her senses when she understands what has happened. The cage shall be a gilded one, and I will feed her on the sweets that will soon make her care more for me than all the rest of the world."

"You mean ter drug her?"

"I shall have to," was the cold-blooded reply.

"I can never conquer her in any other way, I fancy."

"Dat girl is an obstinate little fool."

"She is obstinate, that is certain enough. And she is fresh as a flower! It is a perfect wonder to me how such a thing can exist under such circumstances in this big town."

"Well, it is odd, an' dat's der fac'."

"Let's have somethin' to drink."

But The Tipper objected.

"I hain't in der habit of sayin' no, an' youse know dat, but yer hain't in der shape ter drink any more. Yer wouldn't be in it ter-night if yer did."

"Perhaps that is so," confessed Mac. "And thisthing must be worked to-night."

"Sure?"

"Sure. Do you know where to find the kid?"

"I knows where he generally holds out sellin' pape's. He'll prob'ly be roun' dere."

"Well, you know where to take him. Then come back and help me out."

"O. K."

"Everything is settled?"

"Yes."

"Do you need any money?"

"Well, I'd like a little ter have where I could feel it in me pocket."

"Here's an X."

"T'ankee."

Dan knew they were about to leave the stall, so he opened his bottle and poured out a glass. He was sipping it as they passed toward the door.

"Well, well, well!" he laughed to himself.

"I'm on in great shape! But I must follow Mac. I'll block this game, if I live!"

When the two sports left the saloon the detective was not far behind. They sauntered along the street, and he followed.

At a corner they parted, and then Dan shadowed Edgewood.

"You're walking on uncertain ground, my fine fellow," thought the detective. "The first thing you know you will be deep in the soup."

Edgewood was smoking a cigar, and he held his walking-stick after the approved fashion as he made his way along the street. He had swallowed just enough liquor to make him ready for any act, criminal or otherwise, that would bring about his desired end.

Dandy Mac knew the man he wished to see, and he was fortunate in soon finding him. It was a cabman who had been in the Game Sport's employ before—an unscrupulous fellow, ready for anything that paid well.

Double-voice Dan was forced to remain at a distance while negotiations were going on between the plotting rascal and the conscienceless cabman.

"He is hiring the fellow for the job," thought Dan. "Now, I have a large idea."

He did not express that idea, but when Edgewood moved away, after handing some money to the cab-driver, Dan did not follow him any further. Instead of that, he approached the cabman, as soon as Mac had disappeared.

"Cab, sir?"

"Well, not exactly," replied Dan, removing his spectacles and fixing his cutting eyes on the man. "I have a little business with you, my friend."

"The driver looked surprised and uneasy."

"Well, what is it?" he growled.

"I want to take your place this evening."

"The deuce you do!"

The fellow was astounded.

"Well, I do," affirmed the detective. "You are engaged for a certain little job, eh?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"Yes, you do."

The cabman began to bluster, but Dan calmly put out his hand, saying quietly:

"Simmer down, Jack Bowers."

The fellow fell back, startled and paling.

"You—you know—"

"Yes, I know you, Jack."

"That is not my name!"

"Don't lie."

"Who in blazes are you?"

Dan deftly removed the false beard he had been wearing.

"An old friend, Jack," he smiled.

"Dan Downing!" gasped the frightened cabman.

"Correct."

"What do you want of me? I have not been doing anything."

"That may be true, but you are on the verge of doing something."

"What do you mean?"

"Now, look here, Jack; I had the disagreeable task of sending you up once."

The man scowled a bit.

"You did," he acknowledged.

"And you promised to go straight when you got out. The judge let you off easy, and I was instrumental in getting a light penalty."

"I haven't forgot that."

"You say you haven't, but you are taking another job that may get you into as bad scrape as before."

"What job?"

"You know what I mean."

"No."

"Come, come! what's the use of trying to fool me, Bowers! I saw you talking with Dandy Mac."

"Well, what of that?"

"He hired you for to-night."

"Yes."

"You are to be at a certain place at a certain time."

"Yes."

"And he is to have a passenger."

"You know it all."

"Did you know it was to be a case of kidnapping?"

Bowers looked startled.

"No."

"Come now, Jack, that is thin!"

"On my soul I did not!"

"What did Mac tell you?"

"He told me his passenger would be a young lady friend."

"Where were you to take them?"

"He did not say."

"Talk straight, Bowers!" was the stern command. "It will be the worse for you if you try to deceive me."

"I am not trying to deceive you; I am telling you the truth. He did not say where I was to take her, but told me he would give instructions to-night."

Dan bowed his head in thought for a moment, but his wits were swift to form a plan.

"Jack."

"Well, sir."

"I must take your place to-night."

"Take my place, sir?"

"Yes, act as cabman."

The fellow hesitated and stammered, but did not seem able to say a word.

"As I have told you," said Dan, "this is a kidnapping case, and a serious one. If you were concerned, it would go mighty hard with you. But, I take your place, you will not be rung into it at all. At the same time, you must keep your mouth closed. See?"

Bowers nodded.

"Then it is settled. I will make it right with you, you may be sure of that. All I want is the cab and your clothes. I will make myself up to look like you, and I defy Dandy Mac to tell the difference in the night. But I scarcely dare trust you, Jack."

"You need not be afraid to trust me, sir."

"I know you of old. I fancy I will keep an eye on you. It will only be a reasonable precaution."

And Dan did keep his eyes on the fellow. Bowers did not get out of the detective's sight for a moment till the time came to drive the cab to the appointed place.

By that time Dan had made up as a very good likeness of the cab-driver, and he drove to the spot chosen by Edgewood.

It was between ten and eleven in the evening when he arrived there, and he did not expect Edgewood to appear for more than an hour. In this he was right.

Dan took good care to place his cab so that his face would be shaded from the full glare of the electric light.

It was not far from midnight and that particular street was almost deserted when he saw a group of dark figures approaching. One of the figures hurried ahead, hoarsely whispering, as he reached the side of the cab:

"All right, Bowers?"

"All right," replied Dan, cautiously.

As the others came up, he saw in their midst a something that was like a huge bundle, but was not unlike a human form. His heart gave a great leap of rage, but he remained quiet as the figure was hastily bundled into the cab.

Up beside Dan sprang one of the men.

"Go ahead," he commanded.

And then, as the man snatched the reins from Dan's hands, the detective received a terrible blow on the head—a blow that sent him tum-

bling from the seat to the paving, where he lay stunned, as the cab rattled away and disappeared in the darkness!

CHAPTER XXX.

WALTER'S DISCOVERY.

GASPING from the excitement of his exertions and narrow escape, Walter St. Cyril lay in the passage, listening to hear any sound that might come from the cellar.

He heard nothing.

It seemed as if he lay listening for hours. He wondered how much time had elapsed since his capture.

Hearing nothing from the cellar, he sought to move the stone that had closed the passage.

It would not stir!

In vain he tried to move it; it remained as firm as if cemented in place.

A feeling of horror crept over the young man. What kind of a scrape was he in? Had he jumped from the fryingpan into the fire? No, no; he felt as if his situation could scarcely be worse than it was before. He had escaped from the clutches of Ben Sukes.

But might it not be he was buried alive in that tomb-like place? De Weasle had not told him how to escape from it, and there really might be no exit but by the way he had entered. The gamin might have intended to tell him how to move the stone from the inside and get out after Sukes and his pals had taken the alarm and fled.

And then the darkness and the rats! Had he not known he possessed some matches, he might have been driven wild by the terrible gloom of the place.

The air was foul, and he decided to move. The tunnel was so small he could not rise to a crouching position, and he was forced to creep along on hands and knees.

He wondered why the tunnel had been made, and a ready answer presented itself. It was probably the construction of criminals who had built it for the purpose of escaping from the police when hard pressed.

As he crept along, it gradually grew larger till, after a time, he was able to arise to a half-upright position.

He struck a match and looked around. It was not an inviting prospect. Darkness and slimy walls of dirt and stones.

As the match went out, he involuntarily uttered a groan. The horrible sound of his voice startled him so he trembled violently.

He again pressed on. He was eager to get out, and he wondered how far the tunnel would extend.

Had the day passed and another night come on?

He asked himself the question, but was unable to answer it.

Suddenly he fancied he heard the sound of running water. He paused and listened, making sure he was not deceived.

"I wonder what it can be?" he thought.

He struck a match and soon discovered the solution.

The tunnel ran close beside a sewer, and there was a break in the upper wall of the latter. The break was as large as a man's head, and he fell on his knees to peer through.

Lighting a fresh match, he held it through the break and gazed at the black water that was sweeping along beneath. The sight fascinated him, and he held the match as long as he could.

As the light was dying in his fingers he saw something swept along by the water.

A body—an upturned, ghastly face—a woman's!

The match went out and a tiny spark fell from his fingers to be instantly extinguished by the water.

And there in the blackness of that tunnel crouched a brave man who was trembling like an aspen. Never so long as he lived could Walter St. Cyril forget the sight of that dead woman's face as it was swept beneath him by the black water of the great sewer.

How came it there?

That was a mystery of the big city. Another tragedy had taken place somewhere in New York, and the sewer was carrying the result of the crime down to the river. It was "one more unfortunate."

For a long time Walter crouched there by that opening in the sewer, feeling unable move. His strength had apparently entirely deserted him.

After a while, he was seized by a desire to arise and flee. It was only by a mighty effort of his will that he conquered the impulse.

Hunger was gnawing upon him, but he did not notice that. His only thought was to escape from the horrible hole.

Onward he went again.

At last he reached the end of the tunnel.

Lighting a match, he looked around, only to utter a groan of dismay as he saw a wall of stones. He searched for an exit from the place, but searched in vain.

"My God!" he whispered. "Is it possible I am buried alive in this horrible hole? Is there no escape?"

He thought of the sewer.

"That might be a last resort," he said. "I

could make that opening large enough to get through, I think, and then, with the tide out, I could let the water carry me down to the river. It will be a most desperate thing to do, but I can swim like a duck, and I will try it before I will remain here to starve."

He turned back, moving slowly along. He had not gone far before a gasp escaped his lips.

Through a tiny chink in the wall shone a ray of light!

It had not been there when he came along before, but he was not long in reaching it now.

With his fingers, he eagerly tore away the dirt and stones till, through a small opening he found he could look into a furnished cellar.

It was a far from inviting-appearing place, but Walter's heart bounded with delight, for he felt that he could escape by that cellar.

Looking into it, he saw that it was unoccupied at that moment. The light came from an oil lamp suspended from the low ceiling.

Walter was about to enlarge the aperture when the sound of voices prevented him from doing so. He watched and listened, and a moment later, two persons entered the cellar from what seemed an adjoining apartment. One was an old man, and the other a dapper, dandyish young fellow that Walter remembered to have seen with Marlton Edgewood once on a time.

"It'll be all right, an' don't you fergit dat, old boy," the dandyish individual was saying.

"Jest keep der kid safe an' sound, an' Dandy Mac pays der bills, same as he alwus done."

The old man was a greedy, unscrupulous-looking person, and he showed some yellow teeth, as he rubbed his hands together and grinned in a horrible fashion.

"Oh, I'll keep him all right, if Mac foots ther bill," he nodded. "I'm an honest old man, and I must make a livin' some way, so I—"

"Dat'll do!" cut in the other, with a look of disgust. "You makes me sick wid dat kind of tork! You know you're der worst old devil in New York. You'd cut a throat fer a dollar any day! Don't give Ted der Tipper none of dat bluff, fer he's on wid bote feet. See?"

The old man tried to protest, but his companion would not listen to a word. Without delay he took his departure, leaving the old villain alone in the cellar.

"Ha, ha!" chuckled the aged wretch. "Money—more money! Oh, yes; I'll look out fer ther kid!"

Walter began gradually taking down the wall so he could suddenly break through into the cellar.

"By heaven!" was his excited thought. "It is not impossible but I have found the place where my kidnapped cousin is concealed."

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE WIFE'S DISCOVERY.

IN the library of his home Horace Morton spent the greater part of his time. Except his own chamber, the aged broker seemed to shun the other rooms of the house as far as possible.

Why? Perhaps he did not wish to meet the woman whom the world knew as his wife.

Upon the evening of Suke's visit to the old man, he was still in the library. The gas was lighted and the shades drawn.

He was not alone. With him was the woman who had tried to see him the day before—Mary Mayhew, the adventuress.

The old man was on his feet, clinging convulsively to the back of a chair, while the woman had settled herself comfortably in a seat.

"Why do you come here—why do you make my life miserable?" Morton was saying, a drawn look of pain on his face.

The woman laughed a bit, showing some very pretty teeth. She had once been ravishingly beautiful—she was still handsome, despite the fact that something about her face hinted of a dissipated life. She had been drinking, but was holding herself so well in check she did not betray the fact.

"Do sit down—husband!"

He recoiled as if she had struck him with one bejeweled hand. He put up one hand and glared at her.

"Very good," was her cool comment. "You would make an excellent old man character on the stage, Horace."

"You—you—devil!"

The words seemed forced from his lips with the greatest difficulty. He was shaking with his emotions.

"Oh, come now!" protested the beautiful schemer. "That is not the proper way to address your loving wife."

He seemed suddenly imbued with the fire and fury of a younger man. He did not walk toward her—he sprang! She was truly startled, and a low scream was forced from her lips, as she essayed to rise from the chair. He grasped her wrists and forced her back.

"My God!" she gasped, in sudden fear. "What would you do?"

He did not reply, but he plainly tried to get his bony hands on her throat.

"Stop!" she cried. "I will scream for help! You would murder me! I will cry out and bring the house to this room! Think—think what will follow!"

She fought him off with all her strength, but her words were what brought him to his senses. He paused, still clutching her wrist and breathing hard, as he glared upon her like a baffled beast.

Never before had the woman been afraid of him, but now her soul was stirred with fear, for she saw the man was driven to the verge of madness.

"Curse you!" he panted. "I would kill you if—if—"

"If you dared! Well, you do not. It would mean your own ruin, old man! Let me go!"

In the heat of his fury, his sudden strength had been too much for her, but he had exhausted it in the struggle, and she now flung him staggering away. He would have fallen but for a chair. This he clutched, and there he stood, still glaring at her.

She had leaped to her feet, and her teeth were exposed by the back-drawn lips. The color which had fled from her cheeks at his sudden attack now returned, and she looked like a magnificent tigress.

"You old wretch!" she grated. "And you dared attack me in such a manner!"

"You drove me to it."

"I drove you to it? There, there! do not talk like a child!"

"You did."

"How?"

"By your words—your manner."

"My words? I only called you my husband. My manner? It was simply the manner of a loving wife. And you—"

"You are no wife of mine!"

"Man, you are crazy!"

"I swear it—you are not my wife!"

"Do you deny you married me?"

"I deny anything—everything!"

The woman made a swift gesture.

"They said you were becoming an imbecile in your old age, but I did not believe it. Now it is plain they spoke the truth. You talk like a child!"

The old broker sunk down in the chair, his strength refusing to support him longer. His face showed how severe the strain was upon him. He was haggard and fairly ghastly.

"Perhaps I am not such a fool as you suppose. I have destroyed all the proof—"

"Ha! ha! Now it is plain you think me a fool! No, no, no, old man! Do not deceive yourself in such a manner! Do you really think I would allow the proof to be destroyed?"

"There was no record of the marriage."

"Confessed."

"The one who officiated is dead."

"True."

"The witnesses are dead or disappeared."

"Right there is where you are away off. I can place my hands on two witnesses, and that in a very few hours."

"Who are they?"

"I need not name them."

"Look here, woman, once I bought you off. You took a solemn oath you would never trouble me again. After that I was led to believe you were dead."

"A little trick of mine," laughed the adventuress.

The old broker started as if he would again spring up, but she made a cat-like leap that brought her close to him, and, with a savage push, she forced him back.

"No, no you don't! You tried it once, and I am not going to give you another chance, you may depend on that. Never before in all my life have I been afraid of you; but now you have betrayed there is something more than water in your veins, old though you are. I saw the hell in your eyes, and I knew in your thoughts I was as good as dead."

"Yes, I would have killed you then, had I been able."

"You make no bones of confessing it."

"Why should I? In some way you must be forced to leave me alone, or you will ruin me."

"Oh, not so bad as that, Horace!"

"That is what you are trying to do!"

"You are mistaken. That would be folly on my part. I am simply trying to make you recognize the rights of a wife and give me the support that is justly my due."

"There is nothing your due!"

"How do you make that out?"

"You deceived me—you lured me to link myself to you! All the time you were plotting for my wealth!"

"Will you stand up in court and swear to this?"

He was silenced for a moment, but his eyes still gleamed with the hatred in his soul. At length, he spoke:

"Why did you not keep your word and leave me alone, as you agreed?"

"Did you think me a fool?" she sneeringly asked. "You were silly to think that I could be bought off in such a way. I have played my cards well, and now I want the winnings. I led you to believe I was dead, hoping you would marry again, for then I knew I would have a cinch."

"Vile creature!"

"Oh, you did not think so once! You called me ravishing—divine—all that stuff!"

"I was under your accursed spell!"

She laughed triumphantly.

"Such talk is folly!"

"Folly or not, it is true."

"Do you think any one would believe you? And if they did, what good would it do? The fact would remain that I am your lawful wife and you are a bigamist."

He suddenly crouched and cowered in the chair, terror expressed on his face. She saw his nerve was leaving him, as he was no longer supported by his anger, and she pressed her advantage, resolved to make the most of it.

"What would be the result of exposure? Think of it, old man! It would mean eternal ruin and disgrace!"

"My God!" he gasped. "Have I not thought of it till I am nearly mad! It has broken me down and made me old before my time! I was strong and able to still fight the battle of life with younger men, but the horror of the sword suspended above my head has brought me to the plight I am now in! Why should an affliction befall me in my old age!"

He covered his face with his hands, and his entire body shook with emotion. The handsome woman allowed her lips to part in a triumphant smile, for she now felt confident the battle was easily hers.

Bending over him, she spoke steadily, softly:

"There is no need of your making so much of this affair, Horace. Although I am your lawful wife, be sure I will not claim the place now possessed by another. All I ask is that you pay me reasonably well to keep my lips closed."

"Pay you reasonably well! For Heaven's sake, woman, what do you call 'reasonably well'? Look at the money you have already received from me!"

"I cannot look at it, for it is out of sight. To tell you the wretched truth, Horace, I have blowed it in to the last dollar, and now I am in desperate need of more. If it were not so, I would not be here. You forced me to come in person, for you answered none of my letters."

"They went into the fire unopened."

"And you were very foolish to thus destroy them. You might have known it would only bring me to you. I am a woman who will not be balked. Never yet have I been beaten in anything I set out to accomplish. When I resolved to win the rich widower, Horace Morton, for my husband, such a thing seemed so impossible that my only confidant sneered at me. I set about it, and I succeeded."

"The more fool me!"

"Oh, that is accordingly as you look at it. I was certainly handsome in those days, and I do not believe you made such a very bad bargain."

"You fired my blood—you drove reason from my head! And I was old enough to have possessed more sense!"

"Well, now it is all over and past, why not make the best of it? I have told you I would claim none of the rights of a wife, and I meant it."

Morton slowly arose to his feet. She fell back and watched him curiously.

"You claim you can produce witnesses to this marriage, but I deny it. One of your witnesses was here to-day."

She started.

"What?"

"It is true."

"What?"

"One of the men concealed in the adjoining room when the ceremony took place."

The woman fell back, with a low cry of dismay.

"Was here?"

"That is what I said."

"Why did he come here?"

"For money."

A look of fury flashed across her face.

"Has he dared? I thought he was silenced. He has been playing double!"

There was an air of triumph about the old broker as he stood before her. He had been reserving this for a final resort, and now he felt it would work better than he anticipated.

For a little time the adventuress stood as if in doubt, and then she forced a laugh.

"Well, he is not the only one."

"You will find he is."

"What do you mean?"

"Just this, madam: The other witness has been put out of the way."

He saw the dismay she could not conceal, and he almost smiled.

"Put out of the way?" she slowly repeated.

"Exactly."

"But I know where to put my hands on Ben Sikes."

"And he is the one with whom I have been negotiating."

That final word enraged her.

"And so you have negotiated with him? To what result?"

"I have paid him money to keep his mouth closed."

"Ah?"

"And now—now—"

"What?"

"He is ready to swear he knows nothing of the marriage."

The cry she uttered was one of mingled rage and pain. Her features were working with the passion that had fastened its grasp upon her.

"He shall suffer for this!"

"He is infuriated by your treatment, and says he will go to any extent for revenge. You no longer have him in your power."

"And you refuse to recognize my rights?"

"I do."

She madly paced the length of the room, then she came back and stood before him.

"Horace Morton," she said, with a manner that was little short of tragic, "I am not a woman to be toyed with in this manner. That man owes much to me, and now that he has turned against me, he shall feel my power. Yesterday I put a spy upon his track. I made a discovery that concerns you deeply."

"Concerns me?"

"Yes. I believe your nephew is missing?"

The old man gave a gasp.

"Yes, yes! I do not understand it! I have sent for a detective, but my messenger has been unable to find him. I mean to put the case in the hands of the police."

"It may not be necessary."

"What do you mean?"

"I know where the young man is."

"You do?"

"Yes."

He was greatly agitated.

"Where—where? Speak out—tell the truth! What has become of my boy Walter?"

"I suppose you will pay well to learn, for he is in terrible danger?"

"Yes, I will pay well."

A smile of satisfaction rested on the scheming woman's face, as she said:

"Then I will accomplish my purpose—I will get money. At the same time I will be avenged on the man who has seen fit to play the traitor toward me!"

"How much money do you demand?"

"A good round sum, and I will agree never to trouble you again. The present Mrs. Morton shall never know she is not the rightful claimant to that name."

There was a rustle—the *portieres* were thrown back from the door that opened into a small room adjoining the library—a pale, stern-faced, fiery-eyed woman appeared.

"I already know all!" she cried, hoarsely.

It was Thora!

CHAPTER XXXII.

A DESPERATE WOMAN.

PICTURE the tableau!

The adventuress was startled and astounded, and the old broker was simply appalled. He shook like a reed before the blast, and his face was like that of a corpse who had died of horror.

Thora stood there, her arms outstretched to grasp the *portieres* on either hand, her eyes glowing like living coals. Her white teeth showed and her delicate nostrils were dilated.

There was dead silence within the room, not one of the three seeming to breathe for a time.

At length, with a groan that came from an anguish-wrung heart, the old broker sunk into a chair, flinging his arms on a little table and concealing his face.

The horrible hour had arrived and he could not face it. All his strength was gone.

Thora's eyes were not turned on the man, but she glared upon the adventuress in a way that would have made the blood of a less daring woman run cold in her veins.

As it was, Mary Mayhew fell back a pace.

Then Thora advanced into the room. Straight toward the other woman she moved, her head thrown back, her hands clinched. She seemed about to strike.

"You have come to claim your husband," she said, her voice sounding cold as ice. "Take him."

The adventuress tried to force a laugh.

"You are very kind!" she sneered.

"Have a care!" came hissing through Thora's white teeth. "I am not to be mocked by such as you!"

The scheming woman surveyed the other from her head to her feet.

"Indeed!" she cried. "From such as I! Well, what are you?"

It was not a question—it was an insulting insinuation. And it struck Thora to the heart, for she caught her breath in a gasp.

Mary Mayhew saw her advantage, and she went on swiftly:

"You are an intruder here!"

"I am intruder?"

"Yes."

"You are the intruder!"

"I am not! I belong here. I am rightfully that man's wife, while you are his—"

"Say it!"

"I will. You are his *mistress*!"

Then it did seem nothing could keep the wronged woman from hurling herself at the taunting creature's throat. Plainly the adventuress expected the attack, for she prepared to meet it.

But Thora restrained herself.

"You are right," she confessed, much to the

surprise of those who heard her. "I am that—nothing more!"

The old man lifted his head and stared at her astounded.

"You are surprised," she went on swiftly. "You will be more so when I tell you I have known all this for years. It was about a year after the birth of little Harry that, quite by accident, one of this woman's letters fell into my hands. It was her first appeal for money after the marriage, and it was the letter that revealed she still lived. I will not tell of what I suffered, but from that day to this, Horace Morton has been nothing to me. I have hated him, but now I pity him. I blamed him for everything, but now I understand he was lured into a trap. His weakness made him an easy prey for such a creature as this. I see it all now."

The adventuress laughed.

"You throw your scorn at me, and yet you have been living with this man all these years, knowing you were his mistress—not his wife!"

"I have not lived with him as his wife. He could have cast me off at any time and been sustained in the courts. He loved our child, and I dared not leave him—for I loved the child, too!"

There was an expression of intense agony on her face, and at that moment Horace Morton understood how much his beautiful wife had suffered.

"Yes, I loved the child," she went on. "It seemed all there was left in the wide world for me. Many a time I was tempted to take it and flee from this roof! But I did not dare! I felt sure I would be overtaken and robbed of Harry. I would have secured a separation from Horace Morton, but I felt that he was wealthy and would bring to bear enough influence to hold the child."

"My God! what have I not suffered! Knowing I was nothing more than this man's mistress, I have lived beneath his roof and been supported by him. The boy kept me here. The man whom I once thought my husband grew to scorn and despise me. Once he threatened to take the boy from me, and it filled my soul with a despair and madness unnamable."

The old broker groaned.

"My God! what a wretch I am!"

The adventuress who had caused all this wretchedness was the only self-possessed one within the room. She had grown calm and almost seemed unconcerned.

Thora continued:

"Within the room beyond that partition I discovered a secret panel. When it was removed, I could hear everything that passed in this apartment. That secret panel has enabled me to become possessed of the whole black truth. I heard all that passed between Horace Morton and the man who claims to have witnessed your marriage to him, woman. I nearly betrayed myself by a fall, but I escaped from the room before any one came to investigate."

"To-night I expected you here—something told me you would come. So I concealed myself in this little room, and I heard all that was said. Now I know every particular of the wretched truth, and my hatred for this man has turned to pity. He is crushed by all that has fallen upon him. His child is gone, and from this night he will see me no more."

Morton struggled to his feet, holding out his thin hands.

"Thora!" he cried—"Thora, my wife!"

She lifted a warning hand.

"Remember I am not your wife."

"You will not leave me?"

"I must!"

"No, no, no!"

"God pity you—God pity us both! There is no other way—I must go!"

"Stay with me!"

"You do not realize what you are asking."

With a swift step, the adventuress was at the old man's side.

"She is right!" cried the woman. "She had better go. You cannot ask her to remain beneath this roof!"

With a fury that was born of madness, he caught her by the arm and sent her staggering from him. She tripped and fell, and then he almost leaped toward her, the intention of a red deed betrayed by his face.

"You infernal tool of Satan!" he shrilly screamed. "You shall die, die, die!"

He would have killed her then and there. She was down, almost stunned by the shock. He was crazed.

Swift as thought, Thora flung her arms about him and held him fast.

"No, no, no!" she gasped.

It was a desperate struggle, but it gave the adventuress time to regain her feet. She was pale with the thought of the danger of a moment before, but she forced a laugh.

"Let him go," she said. "I am not afraid of him now."

She had no reason to be, for again the man was quite exhausted. Thora supported him to a chair. He clung to her when she would have moved away.

"Don't go!" he whispered faintly.

"I must," was her firm reply. "You should see that. I want you to remember I now no lon-

ger hate you—that is past. I am receiving my punishment. I married you for money, for position, and now I am tasting the dregs of the cup. I only blame myself."

She forcibly broke his hold and moved away. "I beg you not to try to find me," she said. "That is my only hope now. Let me go—forget me! If you follow and find me, all the black truth must come out."

He struggled to his feet.

"You are going without anything," came from his white lips. "You are going penniless into the world. Wait—you shall have money—all you desire."

"Money!" came bitterly to her throat. "I do not want it! I can earn enough, for I am strong. Money has been the curse of my life—has ruined me! No, no, never again will I touch a dollar of yours! Farewell!"

She flung open the door and was gone. No one could stop her. She had prepared for the street, and had only to catch up a hat and fly down the steps.

Horace Morton was left alone with the woman who had ruined him.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"HOLED!"

DOUBLE-VOICE DAN was boiling with rage and chagrin as he arose to his feet and found the cab had disappeared. He had been completely tricked, and he felt very cheap about it.

"Well, you are a good one!" he soliloquized, addressing himself. "You deserve promotion, and that is a fact! You have been beautifully taken in and done for!"

"But how was it worked? Of course Bowers is at the bottom of it, and so I will have it in for him. If I don't get a grip on Jack that will make him squeal I am no good on earth!"

He was in a rather dejected frame of mind, to say the least. It was just then that he hated himself heartily.

"It's too bad!" he muttered, as he walked hurriedly along the street. "I meant to get that poor girl out of the scrape and pull the gang, but I have beautifully slipped up and that is all there is about it. I will go to the office and spend an hour wishing I was dead."

He was not in the habit of being foiled in such a manner, and therefore this cut him all the deeper. He lost no time in getting to his office.

As he was unlocking the door, he heard the telephone bell ring frantically.

"Wonder who that can be at this time of night?" he said as he hastened to answer it.

"Is that you, Downing?" came the question, when he had replied.

"Yes."

"Well, I am Paul Norcross."

"Where are you?"

"At — East 8th street. Come at once. Think I have found the missing Morton boy!"

Dan jumped clear off the floor.

"The dickens you do!" he yelled. "Where is he?"

"In a cellar dive near at hand. Come at once. I will wait here. Not a minute to be lost."

"Well, I should think not!" exclaimed Dan, as he snapped himself out of the office. "Chain-lightning could not get me there quick enough!"

But he had to be satisfied with an ordinary mode of conveyance. However, he did not lose any time, although he was inclined to doubt that his assistant had really discovered the missing heir.

Paul met the detective at the appointed place. "What's this you tell me?" demanded Dan.

"You say you have found the Morton boy?"

"I think so."

"Well, you have done the work of your life, if it is true."

"He is a little lame boy who sells papers on the street, if I am not mistaken."

Dan's hopes sunk.

"Why, that's impossible!"

"It may seem so, but it is not so very impossible after all. The boy was run over and injured so he cannot remember anything of his past. He dreams of a beautiful home and a young woman whom he once called mother. He says he once saw this woman in the Park."

The detective shook his head.

"I reckon you are on a false scent, Norcross."

Where is this kid?"

"He is now a prisoner in a cellar over here."

"A prisoner?"

"Yes; he was kidnapped to-day."

"By whom?"

"Tools of Marlton Edgewood."

Dan started.

"Well, that makes it a bit more interesting! Things begin to connect. I see through it, partner. I overheard the plot to capture the boy."

"The deuce you did!"

Dan hurriedly related his story, and Paul's excitement increased with every word. When the detective finished, his companion was in a perfect "sweat."

"Great Scott!" he cried. "That is what I feared! Mamie Winter has been kidnapped by that wretch! He will accomplish his devilish purpose! What is to be done? Oh, man, man! If you had only been able to follow that cab!"

"Well, you can't feel worse about it than I do," soberly asserted Dan. "I was never before tripped in such a beastly manner!"

"What can we do?"

"I only see one thing to do."

"And that?"

"Rescue the boy."

Paul groaned.

"It is all we can do," he finally admitted.

"Let's hurry."

They hastened along till the place was approached, and then Dan gave a low cry of surprise.

A cab was wheeling away from the front of the old building beneath which Paul asserted lay the cellar by which Limpy Tim had been lured.

"By Heaven! I believe that is Jack Bowers's cab!"

"You do? Then let's after it! It is our chance to save the girl!"

The detective caught his companion by the arm.

"Stop!" he commanded. "The girl is no longer in that cab!"

"What?"

"It stopped in front of this place."

"Yes."

"She has been taken in here."

Paul saw that was pretty sure to be the truth.

"Then we may not be too late after all!" he exclaimed, in great relief. "They have probably taken her into the cellar. Come on!"

"Slow and easy," cautioned Dan. "We must have the aid of the police. We shall need assistance, and we have no right to break in there."

"But you are a detective."

"Not a regular, remember. Privates have no more right to break into a place like that than any citizen. They place themselves under the ban of the law when they do so."

Paul was desperate. He did not wish to lose a moment, but Dan restrained him until—

Suddenly excited voices were heard in the cellar. Then came the sound of a pistol-shot!

"Come on!" cried Dan, as he bounded down the steps and hurled himself against the door. "We can't bother with the police now!"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

WALTER TO THE RESCUE.

STEADILY Walter St. Cyril labored on the wall that separated the cellar and the tunnel. He found the task of getting through much more difficult than he had at first anticipated. One thing that was again-t him was that he had to work in the darkness and could not see what he was doing. He was obliged to go entirely by feeling.

And then he found it necessary to work quietly, for the old man was in the cellar beyond a great deal of the time, and Walter did not wish to arouse his suspicions. He did not proceed to enlarge the tiny aperture, but he slowly took down the wall on the tunnel side, so he could burst through in a moment when he desired.

This was the work of hours, and the young man was nearly prostrated by hunger and want of sleep. It seemed as if a week had elapsed since he walked into the trap set by Ben Sukes, and yet he had no recollection of sleeping or eating since becoming a captive. He began to fancy he must look like a living skeleton.

Sometimes he would hear the old man muttering in the cellar, and he would cease work to listen. That the occupant of the cellar was a heartless old wretch became evident from his words. Walter also heard some things that set him to thinking very earnestly.

"Hel! hel! hel!" the old wretch would chuckle, rubbing his yellow, skinny hands together and bobbing his head up and down. "Two kids ter keer fer. Well, I kin take keer of two as well as one, an' I git all ther more money. Money, money, money! I love it—I'd do anything fer it!"

The young man beyond the wall could readily believe the old man spoke the truth. He looked as if he would not hesitate at any crime. That he was a miser his words plainly showed.

"You old devil!" thought Walter. "The end of your life is not far away, and still you are ready to burden your soul with more sins!"

Sometimes the old villain would move about the cellar, and twice he disappeared through a door, returning each time with that devilish grin on his face.

"Two purty birds, if one is a cripple! An' ther same man pays fer ther keep of both! W'at's he want 'em kept here fer? I dunno, an' it hain't none of my business. I'm not too inquiring, so long as the dollars come in."

"An' he's goin' ter bring somethin' more here ter-night. Wanted ther best room. Hel! hel! ther best room! Well, it hain't so very bad—it's too good fer me ter sleep in. All ther same, he kin have it if he pays well. An' then he said I'd have three birds ter watch. Well, I wonder if the third one is ter be another kid?"

Here the old man shook his head, a crafty look on his evil face.

"Oh, no, no, no! He wouldn't put no kid in therel! Why, that room's papered an' there's a carpet on ther floor—yes, a carpet! There's furnitoor, too! No, no: he hain't goin' ter put a kid inter all that luxury. But what— Well, I guess I know. Young men are full of it—they're devilish!"

The listener shuddered, and once more went cautiously to work on the wall. The old man heard a sound and listened.

"What was that?" he asked himself. "Rats—it must have been rats."

"Oh, yes!" thought Walter, "it was a rat—a human rat."

Once or twice the young man struck a match to aid in getting the lay of the stones. Some of them he could not move, but he knew they were the ones that reached through to the cellar side of the wall and were made secure by the cement. He feared he would not be able to break the wall down after he had removed all but the cemented stones, but he felt as if it were his only hope of escape.

Had the old man appeared like an honest person, Walter would have appealed to him, but he dared not do that under the circumstances.

The old rascal seemed waiting for something. Every few minutes he would go to the door and listen, and then he would move away, slowly shaking his head.

"He said they would come if somethin' did not go wrong," muttered the miser. "What kin go wrong w'en that cunning crook is kerry-in' out a plan! He allus succeeds. An' they think he's a gentleman in some society! Hel! hel! Oh, he's a schemer! He knows how ter play his keerds fer all they are worth—yes, he does!"

Whenever there would be a rumble of wheels on the stones of the street, the old man would listen closely, giving a sigh of disappointment when the sounds passed on.

"It must be gittin' near midnight," he said, aloud. "I sometimes think I need a clock, but I can't afford one. They are so expensive! It's a shame that anythin' like that should cost money! How much money a man could save if he didn't have ter live!"

The old cellar-dweller did not appreciate the irony of his own words.

Beyond the wall, the young man was thinking it was a pity such creatures as the wretched old man found it necessary to live. It was certain the world would be better off without them.

At length there was once more a rumble of wheels outside, and the sound ceased at the steps which led down into the cellar. The old man was all atremble with anticipation, as he listened at the door.

Steps approaching! A peculiar rap on the door!

Without hesitation, the miser opened the door a bit. As he did so, it was thrust open with a violence that sent him tumbling to the floor.

Walter was watching at the chink in the wall.

Through the open doorway came Ted the Tipper, and Dandy Mac followed at his heels.

The Dead Game Sport carried something in his arms—something that was enveloped in a great cloak and looked remarkably like a human figure.

"Close the door, Ted," he ordered—"close it lively!"

The dapper dandy lost no time in obeying the order.

"Where is there an easy-chair?" asked Mac, as he stared angrily around. "Come, you old fox, bring out your easy-chair! This burden is precious and it must have the best."

The miser hurried into a dark corner and returned, dragging an old chair that had once been comfortable, indeed. In this Dandy Mac placed the bundle, and now it looked more than ever like a human figure.

"It—it—hain't dead?" ventured the miser, fearfully.

"No."

Mac began removing the enveloping cloak.

"She hain't dead," agreed the Tipper; "but she can't be fur from it, pal."

"Bring me some wine, old man," ordered Mac.

"Wine?" gasped the old sinner. "You must be crazy! I hain't seen a drop of wine fer years!"

Mac growled and flung back the last fold of the enveloping cloak.

The pale, beautiful face of Mamie Winter was revealed. Her eyes were wide open and she was conscious, but seemed dazed.

From the tunnel beyond the cellar wall came a smothered cry of amazement.

The three villains started and stared around in a startled manner.

"Hear dat!" exclaimed Ted.

"What was it?" asked Mac.

The miser shook his head.

"I dunno," he replied.

The three men were startled greatly, and they showed their alarm.

"It sounded like the voice of a human being," asserted Mac.

"Dat's w'at I t'ought," nodded Ted.

"It couldn't been," the old fox hastened to say. "We are alone in the cellar. It must have been rats."

"Well," observed The Tipper, "dat was a mighty odd soun' fer a rat ter make."

"But, as Old Grimmer says, it could not be a person. I guess it was a rat. Have you some whisky, Ted?"

The dapper dandy nodded and produced a small flask.

"Allus kerry dat fer 'mergencies," he explained.

Edgewood unscrewed the top of the flask and placed it to the girl's lips.

"Drink a swallow of this," he said, speaking as pleasantly as possible. "It will do you good."

The instant the fiery liquor touched the girl's lips, a remarkable change came over her. Color seemed to leap to her cheeks and life to her being. She gave a low cry and started from the chair.

"Where am I?" she asked, gazing wildly around. "How came I in this place?"

"There, there, my dear," said Mac, soothingly, astonished at the sudden change. "Don't get excited; you are all right."

But that did not quiet the girl in the least. She was in a strange place, and the presence of the men filled her with alarm.

"Who are you?" she asked, recoiling from him when he tried to approach her. "I do not know you! I was seized on the street—I was nearly smothered! Then all became black. Now, I find myself here! Explain this!"

Edgewood uttered something that had the semblance of an oath.

"She's goin' ter kick up a bobbery!" hissed The Tipper. "Der drug has lost its 'fect! If she screams—"

"Stand back!" commanded the beautiful girl. "Attempt to lay a hand on me, and I will scream!"

The old miser began to creep around behind her. The sight of his crouching figure and his evil face was anything but agreeable.

Mamie had been kidnapped and brought to that den, and now she was in the greatest danger of her life. Unaided, it would be impossible for her to escape the grasp of the vile wretch who had plotted her ruin.

"Jump fer her!" hissed the dapper rascal. "Dat's der only way! Now—"

Then there came a crashing sound and a portion of the cellar-wall came tumbling inward, bringing with it a human figure that hastily scrambled to its feet and leaped to the side of the imperiled girl.

"Back, you dogs!" cried a ringing voice, as Walter St. Cyril confronted the astounded trio. "Attempt to lay a hand on this girl at your peril!"

His face was pale and his hands and clothing were covered with dirt, but he stood before them like a defiant Ajax.

CHAPTER XXXV.

WHAT LIMPY TIM TOLD.

THE girl knew a friend had come to her aid, and she shrunk close to his side. He put an arm about her waist, still with his eyes fastened on the astonished villains.

"Good God!" gasped The Tipper.

Dandy Mac said nothing, and Old Grimmer crouched close to the floor.

Then Walter began to retreat, pressing the girl gently toward the opening in the wall.

The moment the young man did this there was a stir.

"Stop!" shouted Marlton Edgewood, furiously.

"I'll put a bullet through der bloke!" exclaimed The Tipper, snatching out a revolver.

In some way, the weapon was discharged.

Then came a thundering at the door!

Dandy Mac rushed at Walter St. Cyril, but was sent reeling backward by a hard fist. His head struck the oil lamp that swung from the ceiling.

There was a crash and then darkness.

At the same instant the outer door went down with a splintering sound, and Double-voice Dan was in the cellar.

Fortunately the light was extinguished and the oil did not catch fire. Otherwise there would have been a lively conflagration.

Without hesitation, the detective sprang into the cellar. As he did so, a figure darted past him, escaped Paul Norcross and fled up the stairs.

"Look out for others!" warned Dan, remembering he had heard a second pistol-shot just as the door went down. "They are armed!"

At the same time, he was swiftly producing a tiny pocket lamp, which he always carried. In a few seconds, the strong reflector of the lamp was throwing its piercing ray of light about the cellar.

There was a groan as of pain, and the light showed a figure on the floor.

It was Marlton Edgewood!

The man had both hands pressed to his breast, and they were dyed crimson!

He was wounded!

There did not seem to be any one else in the cellar except the two detectives.

Paul Norcross knelt by Edgewood's side.

"Do you know me?" he asked.

"Is it Norcross?"

"Yes."

"Curse you!" groaned the unlucky wretch. "Why didn't you die when I left you in the mountains?"

"I wanted to live to make you regret your treachery. I swore to hunt you down."

"Well, you have succeeded. I am hard hit."

"How were you shot?"

"The Tipper did it. I suppose it was an accident. Where is he?"

"You are the only person we found."

"Then St. Cyril is not here?" I wonder how he happened around? I can't understand it."

"And I cannot explain now."

At this moment, two policemen appeared at the cellar steps, demanding to know what the row was about. Dan immediately gave a hasty explanation, telling one of the officers to send in an ambulance call, as there was a badly injured man in the cellar.

While the officer was doing this, Dan searched for the others, aided by Paul, Edgewood having been left in the care of one of the policemen.

They passed through a door into a room beyond, where they saw another door standing open. Looking through this, they beheld a dungeon-like apartment that was close and foul. There was a bed of rags in the corner, and on the ground in the center of the room lay a motionless figure.

"It is Limpy Tim!" cried Paul. "He is dead!"

The lame newsboy was not dead, but he was unconscious. They carried him from the horrible place back to the first room they had entered, and there they set about restoring him to consciousness.

After sending in the ambulance call, the policeman returned to the cellar, and, with the officer, Dan Downing continued his search.

Some time was spent in this manner, but they found nothing more.

Old Grimmer had disappeared.

Then they examined the break in the wall through which Walter St. Cyril had made his appearance.

They were astonished to find the tunnel beyond, but no trace of Walter or the girl did they discover.

Meantime, Limpy Tim had been restored to consciousness.

"You are all right, my boy," assured Paul.

"But my head," plaintively protested the little fellow. "It hurts awfully!"

"Yes; I should say you had been struck on the head. There is a large contusion."

"It was that horrid old man."

"What old man?"

"Oh, the worst old man I ever saw."

"Did he strike you?"

"Yes. He was going to drag the other boy away, and I told him he should not."

"The other boy?"

"Yes, sir."

"What other boy?"

"The one they shut me up with. That cruel old man used to beat him awful he said."

"How old a boy?"

"I guess he was about as old as I."

A strange look passed over Paul's face, and he showed a renewed eagerness in his question:

"Did he tell you his name?"

"No, sir; he did not dare."

"Didn't dare?"

"No. He said the old man would beat him. Oh, the old man used him awful! He didn't have much to eat, and he was kept in that dreadful place all the time."

Dan Downing was listening, and he exchanged a significant look with Paul.

"Did the boy tell you anything about himself?"

"Just a little."

"What?"

"Oh, he cried and said he had been taken from his mother."

"Anything more?"

"No. He made me promise not to let the old man know he told that."

Just as the ambulance rolled up to the door, the detective turned to Marlton Edgewood, saying sternly:

"Edgewood, you may as well make a clean breast of this. You are at the bottom of it all. Where is Harry Morton?"

"I know nothing about him," asserted the wounded man, sullenly. "If you find him, it will be without my assistance."

A grim look settled on the ferret's face, and he said to Paul:

"Without doubt, this other boy is the missing heir. When we find this old man, we shall find the boy, and our search will be ended."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

HOW WILL IT END?

As the lamp was broken, and the cellar plunged in darkness, Walter St. Cyril pulled the frightened girl back through the opening into the tunnel. He did not know help was so near, and he felt their only safety lay in the tunnel.

"Trust me," he said. "I will save you in some way! They shall not touch you again!"

"I do trust you," replied the girl, clinging to him. "I know you will save me!"

That was enough to make him feel able to cope with a score of giants. Still, for her sake, he would not be rash. Without noticing which way he turned, he led her further into the blackness of the damp underground tunnel. He could hear excited voices behind him, but he did not listen to the words uttered.

"If I only had some weapon!" he muttered. "I would give a small fortune for a revolver just now!"

But the only weapons he possessed were those given him by nature. However, he knew how to use those to the best advantage.

Finally, they had penetrated so far into the tunnel that no sounds came to them from the cellar. Walter paused and listened.

He heard the soft sound of running water.

They were close by the sewer.

He thought of the dead woman he had seen swept down to the river, and a shudder ran over him. Then he drew the girl closer to him and moved on again.

"Shall we soon be out?"

Mamie asked the question.

"I hope so," he answered.

Something about the reply filled her with a strange feeling of terror.

"What do you mean?"

He hesitated. He could not tell her the truth at once. What reply should he make?"

"The passage is very difficult," he slowly said. "It grows so small we shall be forced to creep along."

The sound of the sewer had told him they were moving toward the end of the tunnel that opened into the cellar where he had been confined.

Once again he must attempt to move the swinging stone.

If it did not move—

He did not like to think of that. What should they do if the stone refused to move?

And if it opened at his touch, would they be able to escape from the cellar? He thought they might, for it was probable Sukes had discovered his disappearance. In this case, the rascal had, without doubt, made haste to vacate that quarter, expecting a swift descent of the police.

That was Walter's hope.

After a time, the tunnel began to grow smaller. Walter paused.

"I must make sure we are not pursued before I go in there," he said, having lighted a match and surveyed the place. "If we were followed, I could not fight in there."

Their eyes met, and by the last flickering light of the match, the young man read utter trustfulness in the girl's face. How pale yet how beautiful she was! His heart gave a great leap, and he felt he was ready to die for her sake.

"I have seen you before," she declared, as the light went out.

"Where?"

"One night on Broadway, a short time ago," was his reply.

"Yes, yes!"

"You were being followed by a ruffianly crew. I happened to be strolling up the street with a friend."

"And you—can it be possible you are my unknown friend?"

"Well," he confessed, "Clarence and I followed the gang and pitched into them when they assaulted you."

There was a moment of silence, then the girl's voice said:

"What a brave gentleman you are! I owe so much to you! I thank you—I thank you!"

He drew her closer and she did not resist.

"I want to tell you something—now," he said. "It is an honest confession. The first time I saw you was that night, and I was struck by your face. I thought you in danger, and I followed to aid you, if possible. Even now I do not know your name, but I am ready to fight for you as long as I can breathe!"

Again she murmured her thanks.

"I hope you will not misunderstand me," he said, half-falteringly. "I may have to fight our way out of this place—I expect I shall have to do so. And now I—"

He held her close and kissed her there in the darkness of the tunnel. She was startled, but he hastily went on:

"I would not take any advantage for the world, but I thought I deserved that much. Don't be angry with me—please don't! That is all I ask in return for what I have done. You are not angry?"

"No," was her low reply, "I am not angry."

"I am glad of that," he said. "My name is Walter."

"And mine is Mamie."

"A sweet name, but not half so sweet as the owner of it! That is not flattery, for I am in earnest. But tell me how you came in the power of the villains who brought you to that cellar."

"I scarcely know. Tim did not meet me to-night, though he had promised. I was going home alone—"

"From where?"

She hesitated.

"I fear you will not think so well of me if I tell you. But I am forced to do something to earn a few dollars."

And I am sure you do nothing dishonorable."

"Oh, I thank you! I will tell you the truth. I have to sing at a theater on the Bowery. I was going home alone to-night when someone suddenly sprung on me. I did not even have time to scream. A stifling cloth was thrown over my head and I was nearly smothered. I think I fainted, for I knew nothing more till I found myself in the cellar."

"But I know the wretch who took you there! I have long believed him a scoundrel and a villain, but have had no evidence. Now I know I am not mistaken. Marlon Edgewood shall pay dearly for this night's work!"

"But come; we will try to get out of this passage. We must go in here. Do not fear to follow."

He led the way, and they crept along the narrowing tunnel. At length the stone was reached.

Lying on the ground, Walter struck a match and examined the rock, trying to find how it was moved.

As he was doing this, he was suddenly amazed to see the stone stir, and evidently swing open of its own accord. It seemed like a miracle.

A ray of light shone into the tunnel—a shrewd and cunning face appeared—the voice of De Weasle cried:

"Jiminy gracious! Here's der feller now!"

Then Walter saw other forms in the cellar.

As Thora, the desperate, sprung down the stone steps of the mansion that had been her home, and reached the sidewalk, she felt a hand on her arm.

"Mrs. Morton!"

She turned. The street light showed a man who wore a wide-brimmed hat and had a cloak-like outer garment.

"Felton—you here?"

"Yes," was the man's reply. "I bring you bad news."

"Bad news! Then—Harry—" She choked and could not finish.

"He has been stolen, Mrs. Morton."

She swayed and would have fallen. He caught her in his arms, speaking swiftly:

"Mrs. Morton, you must not let this overcome you! You have not heard all I have to say. Will you listen? I fear you are going to faint. I have more to tell you."

But she only moaned:

"Kind God, let me die! There is nothing more for me on earth! I have no desire to live! This last stay is swept away, and now I am ready to go!"

"Listen, Mrs. Morton!" almost savagely commanded the man. "I should have broken the news more gently; but I had not finished. I have tracked the kidnapper of your child."

A thrill ran over her and she started up.

"Tracked—tracked—"

"Yes, I followed him to this city."

"Here?"

"Here to New York."

"Then my boy is near?"

"I think so—I am almost certain. That is why I came to you. You have paid me well, and you know I swore I would lay down my life for you after you rescued me from a suicide's grave, by giving me more money than I had ever possessed before at one time. By that act you made the dying moments of my old mother easier, and gave me courage to go out into the world and fight the battle of life. I told you then to call on me when you needed a friend, and I would do anything—"

"You have kept your word nobly, Robert Felton. I do not think it was any fault of yours that Harry— Oh, God! am I to lose him now—after all I have done?"

"Have you any friends on whom you can depend?"

"What do you mean?"

"Any gentlemen friends whom you would dare to have know Harry is still living?"

"None—none!"

Fenton was silent for a moment.

"The situation is a desperate one, truly," he acknowledged; "but I am ready to do all in my power. I think I know where the boy is confined, and I do not believe there is any one but an old man guarding him. We will go for him, and I will force the old man to give him up. Are you ready?"

"Ready—yes! I am mad with eagerness! Let us hasten!"

"It is in the eastern part of the city. We will secure a carriage and be taken there at once."

Together the man and woman hurried down the avenue.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE QUESTION ANSWERED.

AFTER the ambulance arrived and Marlon Edgewood was removed from the cellar, Double-voice Dan and Paul Norcross again sought for the old man, the missing boy and the girl who had been brought into the place by the defeated villain. The police assisted in the hunt, and the

old man and the boy were finally discovered where the aged wretch was trying to obtain concealment from the searchers.

Paul took the boy in his arms. The little fellow was clothed in rags, and already he showed what hunger and abuse had done for him. He thought at first that the searchers were about to kill him, but when the illusion was dispelled from his poor little head he clung to Paul and wept.

Back to the first room of the cellar the old miser was forced by the detective, and Paul followed with the boy in his arms. Dan turned the aged wretch over to the police, while Paul sought to learn the truth from the boy.

"What is your name, my little man?" He asked.

But the child was frightened and did not dare answer.

"Won't you tell me?" urged the amateur detective.

"I am afraid!" was the whispered reply.

"Afraid of what?"

"He will beat me if I tell."

"Who?"

The boy turned his eyes toward the old man, who was glaring at the child, though in the hands of the police.

"That man," whispered the child.

"That man shall never touch you again," assured Paul.

"Take the old sinner where he boy can not see him," commanded Double-voice Dan.

When the policeman had done his, Paul again asked the boy his name.

"Is it Harry?"

Then came the sound of hasty steps descending the stairs, and a man and woman appeared at the door.

The man was Robert Felton—the woman Mrs. Morton.

Thora gazed wildly around—her lips parted—she seemed about to speak.

Paul Norcross saw her, and cried out, chokingly:

"Thora Evans!"

She heard his voice, and she saw the child in his arms. With one wild shriek, she darted forward and snatched the boy from him, covering its face with kisses and sobbing:

"Thank God! My child! my child!"

The rescued boy clung to her with all his strength, crying with joy:

"Mamma! mamma!"

The question was answered.

"Here's der feller now!" cried De Weasle, satisfaction expressed by his voice.

Walter saw the uniforms of policemen in the cellar.

What had happened?

De Weasle quickly explained.

"Come out, pal," cried the gamin. "It's all right, bet yer bood! Der coppers has tumbled down on der place, an' Sukes is nipped. Come out."

Walter only hesitated a moment, then he crept out into the cellar. There were two policemen with De Weasle, and all three were amazed when the young man turned and assisted Mamie in leaving the tunnel for the cellar room.

De Weasle nearly fainted.

"Jiminy gracious!" he gasped. "Dat's der darndest I ever heard of. I never knowed dere was anything like dat in dere!"

Walter easily explained the marvelous appearance, and then one of the officers told him his uncle had given the address of the place where he could be found, and instructed the police to arrest Sukes. The young man could not understand how Horace Morton knew what had become of him, but all was explained later when Ben Sukes and Mary Maybaw were brought face to face.

"So that is your work, is it?" snarled Sukes, who was ironed. "I would like to get at you!"

The adventuress smiled triumphantly.

"I don't doubt it a bit," he said. "But you are liable to go up for a good long time. You played against me, and I determined to put you out of the way for a while. For that reason I told Horace Morton where he could find his nephew."

"And did you tell him I was and still am your legal husband—did you tell him that? No, I can see ye didn't, but I will tell him as much. I will spoil your game now! He shall know that his marriage to you was all a sham, and then you will no longer be able to bleed him by causing him to fear exposure. Ha! ha! ha!"

Sukes closed with an evil laugh, for he saw the woman pale before his words. Even though he went to prison, he would strike one last heavy blow at her.

Before the night had passed, the old broker knew he was in no way bound to Mary Maybaw and that Thora was his lawful wife.

As the reader must imagine, Mrs. Winter was nearly dead of horror and suspense caused by the non-appearance of her daughter and Limpy Tim. She informed the police and they promised to investigate, but Mrs. Winter was a poor woman, and an investigation was not hastened.

The poor woman wrung her hands and wept on the door-step. A kind-hearted Irish neighbor heard her crying bitterly and came to her

comfort, but Bridget found her sympathy was of little avail.

The clocks were striking the hour when a closed carriage came rolling down the narrow street and stopped at the door of the tenement where Mamie lived. A young man sprung lightly out and a crippled boy followed. Then the young man assisted a young lady from the carriage.

"Mother!"

With a scream of joy, Mrs. Winter folded her daughter in her arms.

"We're all here," laughed Limpy Tim, as he grasped Walter's hand. "Mister, you're a brick! We don't forget this!"

Possibly the reader does not fully understand some things about this story, so a few brief explanations must be made.

Of course it is understood that the kidnapping of Harry Morton was at the direct instigation of his own mother, who was led to the foolish act by the fear that the boy would be taken from her by her husband.

Her assistant was the young man Felton, whom she had befriended in a time of adversity and who was ready to lay down his life for her.

The child was taken to a cabin deep in the heart of a New Jersey forest, where Felton, assisted by an old woman, cared for it. It was Mrs. Morton's intention to obtain a legal separation from her husband, and retire to some remote corner of the earth, where she could live without the fear of having her child snatched from her.

Only twice since Harry disappeared had she visited him, and the second time she was followed by Marlon Edgewood, who suspected her secret. Then, in order to obtain absolute power over the mother and open a broad road to Horace Morton's wealth, he stole the child and brought it back to New York.

Edgewood had not arrived at the point of proclaiming his power over Thora, for he hoped to win her by other means. He really wished the woman to have some respect for him, but he had determined the old broker's fortune should be his by fair means or foul.

He over-reached himself and brought about his own ruin.

The reader will remember that while Edgewood was urging Thora to promise to become his wife he spoke of the face seen from the cabin window. It was his own face she had seen, though it was covered by a false beard, and she did not recognize him. He wished her to understand her secret was not a secret to him, and for that reason he spoke of it.

As for De Weasle's story of the boy falling into the sewer, the gamin had first invented the yarn from "whole cloth" for the sake of making a sensation. Felton had discovered the story was false, and he had paid the street Arab to stick to it. De Weasle was naturally dishonest, but not irreclaimably vicious.

What he had passed through was too much for Horace Morton's weakened constitution. He lived to have his wife and child by his bedside, and know everything was righted at last. His last moments were made happy by Thora's tender care, and he closed his eyes in the last long sleep seven days after his child was restored to him.

Morton's will left both his wife and child well provided for, and Walter was not forgotten, by any means.

Ted the Tipper disappeared from New York for a time, while Marlon Edgewood failed to recover from the wound he had accidentally received in the cellar. He died in the hospital, knowing all his evil plans had miscarried and the ones he hated most were triumphant.

De Weasle is still afloat in New York, but Tom Brandon is serving time for breaking and entering.

Old Grimmer died within prison walls.

Mary Maybaw slipped away and disappeared. The man she ruined by her fascinations and started on a career of crime, Ben Sukes, is still behind prison bars. He has sworn to hunt her down when released.

Did Walter marry Mamie? Of course he did! And their social positions were not so very different after all, for the girl fell heir to all her rich uncle's wealth, that gentleman being good enough to die at the very time when the Winters were in the sorest need of money.

Limpy Tim has a good home with his old friends, and he makes himself useful in many ways. The mystery of his past is a mystery still, and is likely to remain so. However, he has no cause to grieve over his fortune.

And Paul Norcross? He thought of becoming a detective, but two years after Horace Morton's death he married the widow, and now he is known as a keen and successful business man of the great city.

Dan Downing—"Double-voice Dan"—has not been seen to advantage in this story, for he really does wonderful detective work and has made an enviable reputation. It is not impossible that the reader may again see the "Go-It-Alone Detective" when he will stand presented in a better light.

THE END.

== BUFFALO BILL'S BEST WORK! ==

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OR,

Opening Up a Lost Trail.

A Romance of a Border Mystery.

BY COLONEL PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF "BUFFALO BILL'S SWOOP," "BUFFALO BILL'S GRIP," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE MINER AT BAY.

In a log cabin, hiding away among the mountains of a Western Territory, a man sat at a rustic table figuring over an account-book.

He was a man of majestic appearance, tall, broad-shouldered, with a head finely poised and a face cast in a mold refined and noble.

THEY HEARD THE WILD, WEIRD WAR-CRY OF BUFFALO BILL'S BUCKSKIN BROTHERHOOD
AS THEY RUSHED TO BATTLE.

Buffalo Bill's Buckskin Brotherhood.

His beard was very long, and his hair also fell in waving masses almost to his waist.

He was dressed in a woolen shirt, dark corduroy pants, top-boots and slouch hat, and wore about his waist a belt of arms.

The appearance of the man was neat, his bearing that of the gentleman in spite of his surroundings.

At last he turned from the table, thrust his hands deep into his pockets, put his feet out toward the blazing fire and became lost in reverie.

Upon the table burned his candle, its light dimmed by the blazing logs.

A shelf of books, a cupboard of provisions, a few cooking utensils, rifles standing in a rack on either side of the door, ready for use, some clothing hanging upon the wall, and a bunk with some fine blankets in it, completed the furniture of the cabin.

"At last," he mused, "the end is at hand and yet it is but the beginning of another life."

"In her letter received to-day, Lucille, poor child! begs me to send for her to come to me, to take Hugh and herself, and faithful Velvet and Carrol, those noble-hearted negroes who have been so true through all, to dwell in the far West, amid associations where no one will come who knows of them and their sorrows through the acts of her villainous uncle, Arthur Leighton."

"And she tells me of our darling child, the little baby daughter which I have never seen."

"Well, about to-day she will receive my letter and my draft for money to bring them all to Chicago, and telling them that I am to leave the mines at once and seek a home for her and all in the Wild West."

"After the blight upon my life by that wretched duel, I care no more for the social whirl I once loved so well, and will be content, yes, happy amid the wilds of this grand land, under the shadow of these everlasting hills."

"Lucille will be happy, Hugh will delight in the wild life, good Carrol and Velvet will also love their new home, and I will establish a ranch and prosper, having about us every comfort gold can buy."

"It is two years since I left New Orleans to seek my fortune, and in that time I have with my own hands unearthed forty thousand dollars—once a small sum to me, but now a real fortune. And it is safe in the Chicago banks, except the belt of gold I have with me."

"To-morrow I will leave, quietly, slipping away from the mines, for who here do I care for?"

"Men have sought to rob me, but have failed, and constantly I dread an attack from the Wolves of the Mines, as those gold robbers are called— Ah! there is the scratch at the door of my faithful friend Claws."

"And he scratches as though something was wrong with him."

Stepping to the door the miner raised a heavy slide near the bottom and in came a tremendous, savage-looking wolf.

"Well, Claws, what is it? You are all humped up with anger, and every hair stands on end like quills on the back of the fretful porcupine," said the miner with a laugh at his own conceit.

The wolf uttered a low growl and sniffed at the door.

"I see, that means that there is some one coming you do not like."

"You have saved my life many a time, good wolf—why, Claws, you act as though you expected his Satanic Majesty to give us a call— Ah!" A sharp knock came at the door.

"Who is there?" demanded the miner.

"Miner Burt, Pard Goldhurst."

"You should have brought Pard Burt's voice with you then," was the reply.

"You always like your little joke, Pard Goldhurst. Let me in, please."

"Not I, for I know you are not Pard Burt."

"Curse you, Granger Goldhurst! I'll enter and help myself to your gold in spite of you. Men, break in the door!" came in savage tones.

Almost instantly there followed a heavy blow against the door, evidently with a log held by several men.

Instantly the miner sprung for his rifles, turned his table upon end, dragged his cupboard before it, and behind this breastwork stood at bay with a revolver in each hand, while his faithful, though savage comrade, Claws, crouched snarling fiercely at his feet.

The brave Briton and his wolf pard were on guard!

GRANGER GOLDHURST was a man of iron strength and unflinching nerve, he knew not how many foes he had to deal with, but suspected them of being a band of outlaws known as the

Wolves of the Mines, who had killed and robbed miners suspected of having gold hoarded in their cabins.

That he was supposed to have large quantities of gold there he well knew. But, he had been too clever for that, for when he went every two weeks to the camps after provisions, he always carried with him the sum he had to send away to deposit to his credit in the banks, the driver of the coach, carrying it through for him secretly.

Now, as he was ready to go, as hope of happiness in the future was opening before him, he felt himself confronted by a terrible danger.

But he did not shrink from it an instant.

The heavy blows upon the door soon told; then he raised his rifle and poured half a dozen rapid shots through the cracks in the now shattered planks.

There was a groan and shouts without, and then silence, but soon another crash came and the door fell in.

He had dropped his rifle now and secured his revolvers.

As the door fell four persons appeared in the doorway, and his weapons began to rattle.

At the same instant Claws leaping at the throat of one man dragged him to the floor.

How many men had come to attack him Granger Goldhurst never knew, for when the Wolf dragged down one man and two fell beneath the unerring aim of the miner's pistols, the others turned and fled, for another of their number, shot through the door, lay dead without.

He had a gash on the head from a bullet, another in the shoulder, while a third ball had cut through his arm, when the volley had been fired.

But, he deemed none of them serious, and so said:

"Go out, Claws, and see if they have gone or if it is a trick."

The well-trained wolf obeyed instantly, and soon returned, no longer showing signs of rage.

"That settles it, Claws; they have gone, or at least those who could get away have done so."

"How many there were I do not know, but four are here, and all dead!"

"I am not dead, but, curses upon you, Granger Goldhurst, I am dying," said one of the men lying upon the floor.

"Who are you?"

"Take this wig and false beard off of me, and you will see. I am powerless to move or I would kill you, yet."

The miner did as he was told, and started back with a cry of amazement, almost of horror, while the name broke from his lips:

"Arthur Leighton!"

"Yes, you know me now."

"And, bad as I deemed you, I did not believe you an outlaw, a robber."

"Well, you see who I am, and what I am now. I heard you had struck a gold mine and had laid up hundreds of thousands in your cabin; so I was tempted to come and rob you."

"Disguised as a miner I reconnoitered the situation, and failing to kill you myself, hired men to aid me."

"This is the result: you are alive and rich, while I am dying."

"Arthur Leighton, you turned your back upon me when first we met, and we became foes."

"When you knew that I was the one who saved your niece from the kidnappers, you sought all in your power to destroy me."

"Yes, and I sent those kidnappers there to seize her, for I intended placing her in an asylum where she would never see the light of day again, and also to get rid of Hugh."

"The man who was sent to prison would have told all, only he did not know me in the matter."

"I expected Lucille and Hugh to fight me in the courts, when they knew I had robbed them, and so wished to get rid of them."

"Now I am dying here in your cabin, by your hand, and soon all will be over."

"I am sorry you die by my hand, for I can never tell Lucille that I killed you."

"I wish the wolf had killed you instead of that man, or—"

"Or what?"

"Or that I could have made you prisoner and allowed you to go your way again free, for I am sick of blood-letting, and it seems my cruel destiny to kill. Is there aught you would have me do for you, Arthur Leighton?"

"No, let me drop out of the world, no one knowing my fate but you, and you will keep the secret," was the answer.

The miner tried to do something to soothe the last hours of the dying man, but met only with rebuff.

At last Arthur Leighton breathed his last, and instantly the miner took his pick and shovel and went forth to dig a grave.

The bodies were buried decently, and as he turned, the miner saw Claws lying at his feet—dead.

"Poor fellow, you got your death wound too, and I did not know it."

"You too shall have decent burial, and then this night will I go from here, yes, the morrow's sun must find me far away from this spot."

And when the sun arose it fell upon a man traveling slowly along a valley trail, for he carried a heavy pack.

The man was Granger Goldhurst, going to find a home for those he loved.

That he did not find that looked-for haven of rest and happiness, it is this story's purpose to relate. The expatriated man—for such the miner was—disappeared so mysteriously that here came in Buffalo Bill's Best Work, to discover the lost Goldhurst, and to bring his captors and persecutors to condign punishment. In Goldhurst was the wanted heir to a most noble name and estate, so the great scout's work was doubly important.

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